

# KUNḌALINĪ

*The Hindu Tenets of the Serpentine Energy  
in Theory and Practice*



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# Kuṇḍalinī

## THE HINDU TENETS OF THE SERPENTINE ENERGY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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### Cover image

A Tantra scroll-drawing which depicts the  
*kuṇḍalinī-śakti* coiled like a sleeping serpent.  
(Drawing courtesy of [www.shaivayoga.com](http://www.shaivayoga.com))

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# Resumé

Denne specialeafhandling er resultatet af et studie og en analyse af forskelligartede materialer, som omhandler både de bagvedliggende teoretiske principper og de anvendte metoder inden for det omfattende hinduistiske koncept, som involverer den feminine, slangelignende energi kaldt *kuṇḍalinī*. Afhandlingen tager udgangspunkt i en undersøgelse af hypotesen, at der under videreførelsen og videreudviklingen af *kuṇḍalinī*-begrebet fra dets første omtale i de tidlige tantra'er til dets inkludering i de yogiske teknikker beskrevet i *haṭhayoga*-manualerne blev lagt mindre vægt på de teoretiske bestanddele – f.eks. det holistiske verdensbillede, at menneskets subtile energier er afspejlinger af komponenter af det kosmiske univers – der ligger til grund for de tantriske ritualer, hvor *kuṇḍalinī*-processen sker som en direkte parallel til den kosmiske evolution, til fordel for de fysiologiske aspekter af den yogiske metodik.

Efter en indledende diskussion af ordet *kuṇḍalinī*s terminologiske og etymologiske oprindelse fortsættes i specialets Del I en undersøgelse af den førromtalte holistiske teori med særligt fokus på de komponenter, som indgår i den anvendte praksis, der har til formål at vække *kuṇḍalinī*-energien. Anden del redegør for den hinduistiske fremstilling af de bestanddele, som udgør mennesket subtile krop, og forsøger at sætte den ind i dens teoretiske sammenhæng, den holistiske verdensopfattelse. Dette leder således op til tredje del, hvori der fokuseres på de praksisser, der anvendes i henholdsvis tantriske ritualer og *haṭhayoga*. Her illustreres, hvorledes det teoretiske udgangspunkt for *kuṇḍalinī*-praksissen til dels skal findes i de kosmogoniske principper, og til dels i nyudviklede sex-orienteret ritualer. Fjerde og sidste del behandler emnet fra to diskursanalytiske perspektiver: det erkendelsesteoretiske og det fænomenologiske. Ydermere perspektiveres emnet til forskellige moderne (særligt de occidentale) fortolkninger af *kuṇḍalinī*-fænomenet. I de afsluttende bemærkninger reflekteres over holdbarheden af den fremsatte hypotese, og der peges på mulige områder inden for emnet, som yderligere kan belyses af fremtidige studier.



# Preface

Enthralled by the rich Indian religious and yogic tradition during the entire time of my academic studies – and even prior to the commencement of these – I felt it natural to dive deeply into the world of spectacular mystics and comprehensive rituals and philosophies that imbue the religious culture of tantric Śaivism. I, thus, consider this thesis to pertain to the first of the following two diverse realms, coalescing into that which forms the core fundament of my exploration of the “religious-spiritual world”: one rooted in intellectual claims of objectivity, the other in personal belief and phenomenological experience.

Nevertheless this study is the result of a scholarly treatment and, therefore, aimed at further topic-related inquiring in that direction, there should be abundance of opportunities for those who wish to approach these pages from more of an “emic”-oriented perspective. Besides the immense satisfaction, to unravel the *kuṇḍalinī* throughout all these pages has gifted me with more understanding of some of the deep mystic peculiarities of the Indian wisdom-tradition in terms of attaining a perspective of more profundity and authenticity. I, therefore, wish to share this investigation into a considerable small portion of the comprehensive yogic tradition with whomsoever will find interest in it whether it be for scholarly or personal reasons.





# Introduction to the Thesis

## 1. Introduction

The concept of the sleeping serpentine nexus of female energy (*śakti*), the *kuṇḍalinī*, who, when awoken from her slumber at the base of the spine, pierces the various energetic centers (*cakras*) located on the spinal column on her arousal up along the central axis (*suṣumṇā*) within the subtle body to the location at the cranial vault, from where she produces the blissful nectar (*amṛta*) which floats downwards in a nourishing stream that pours into the corporeal body, is today commonly known not only in that vast preserved bulk of original tantric and haṭhayogic scriptures produced in medieval India, but also in the global spiritual community as well as by Western scientists considering it to be a psychosomatic phenomenon.

The basic tenets of a mystical subtle energy within the body is as ancient as the Hindu culture itself, but the articulation of to the actual termination, *kuṇḍalinī*, and the development of all the esoteric concepts, rituals and practices that are associated with her awakening originated in early medieval Śaiva-Śākta tantric literature and were later appropriated by the *haṭhayoga* tradition.

There are subtle, internal distinctions between schools that exist under the aegis of Tantrism: Śaivism, Śāktism, Kaulism, and so forth. Historical research into the formative period of *haṭhayoga* presents a rather complex and juxtaposed picture with several emerging sub-branches that venerated as their lineage-holders masters of pre-existing schools. In a general sense, it is justifiable to distinguish between teachings of an early and of the classical type of *haṭhayoga*. The former was a reformation of tantric yoga by two promoters of the Śāktic cult of Kaula Śaivism, Matsyendranātha (c. 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries) and his alleged disciple, Gorakṣanātha (probably 12<sup>th</sup> century), although presumably living three centuries later. The transgressive teachings of early Kaulism anchored in bodily practices and sexual householder-rituals, which constituted a sub-branch of the non-dual Kashmir Śaiva tradition, were later appropriated by the ascetic Nāths in the post-classical period of late Tantrism (roughly 1300 onward).<sup>1</sup> Gorakṣanātha is believed to be founder of the ascetic Nāth *sampradāya* (tradition) and, moreover, the first teacher of (an early form of) *haṭhayoga*. The classical *haṭhayoga* system was formulated in the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* of Svātmārāma (15<sup>th</sup> century) and subsequent scriptures. Much scholarship, however, has not applied this minute distinction and uses ‘Nāth yoga’ and ‘*haṭhayoga*’ interchangeably.<sup>2</sup> The “Śāktisation”<sup>3</sup> of *haṭhayoga* was entirely

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher D. Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated: The Philosophy, History, and Practice of a Timeless Tradition*. 2nd edn. (Petaluma, USA: Mattamayūra Press, 2013), 305-11.

<sup>2</sup> James Mallinson, “Śāktism and *Haṭhayoga*,” (paper presented at a conference on Śākta traditions in Oxford in Sep. 2011, accessed March 19, 2016, <https://soas.academia.edu/JamesMallinson>), 1.

<sup>3</sup> This term is applied by Mallinson, “Śāktism and *Haṭhayoga*,” 26.

successful to the extent that even the celibate traditions were made more Śākta through incorporating the *kuṇḍalinī* into their practice.

The *kuṇḍalinī* was appropriated in Buddhist and Vaiṣṇava tantric systems of yoga as the fiery energy called *caṇḍālī* (consort). Later *kuṇḍalinī* featured widely in the Yoga-Upaniṣads, which were compiled in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The title encapsulating this text corpus particularly alludes to a system that combined *haṭhayoga* techniques with the ancient Upaniṣadic philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, she is introduced in modern forms of Sikhism as a new dimension. The establisher of the Sikh orders in the Western hemisphere, Yogi Bhajan (b. Harbhajan Singh Puri 1929-2004), taught the so-called “*kuṇḍalinī-yoga*,” in which *kuṇḍalinī* is considered to be a person’s creative potential.<sup>5</sup> However, unlike the modern Western postural yoga-system propounded by Yogi Bhajan, the original forms of *kuṇḍalinī-yoga* were not concerned with physical postures or movements at all but rather with visualizations and energy practices of the subtle body, utilizing secret tantric *mantras* and *prāṇāyāmas*.

Thanks to occidental pioneers, such as Sir John Woodroffe (alias Arthur Avalon) and early leading figures within the Theosophical Society who brought the esoteric perspectives and practices taught in the Tantras and *haṭhayoga* manuals to a Western audience, however flawed and in corrupted forms these were presented, the term *kuṇḍalinī* – often in association with the *cakra*-oriented yoga style – became mainstream in Western New Age movements. The number of publications on the *kuṇḍalinī* has exploded over the past thirty years or so, particularly as the tradition of *haṭhayoga* has become popularized in the West. The abundance of *kuṇḍalinī-yoga* classes now being offered at yoga studios around the world are, however, morphed into a practice that hardly resembles, nor could possibly represent, medieval practices implemented to awaken the serpentine energy.

## 2. Purpose and overall structure

Depictions of the subtle body through which the *kuṇḍalinī* becomes active, its subtle channels (*nāḍīs*), *cakras* and even hints at the presence of *kuṇḍalinī* itself are extant in Indian philosophical literature as early as the first Hindu Upaniṣads. However, it is not until the advent of the cults of medieval Śaiva Tantrism that we find the doctrine of *kuṇḍalinī* developing as an integral tenet of speculations on both cosmic emanation and spiritual liberation. Indeed, we find in the source literature – tantric as well as *haṭhayogic* – that rituals and practices and the interpretations of these vary between the religious sects or traditions. It is, therefore, interesting to question whether we are presented with the original intended meaning of the term *kuṇḍalinī* preserved in a continual form throughout its various applications, or if it is rather the case that *kuṇḍalinī* hand in hand, to various extent, with its inherent characteristics

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<sup>4</sup> Mallinson, “Śāktism and *Haṭhayoga*,” 26-27.

<sup>5</sup> Georg Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice* (Prescott, Arizona: Hohm Press, 2001), 336-37.

was adopted as an appropriate symbolic term, which supported the advocacy for each of the religious traditions' soteriological ideas and practices. To answer this question it is necessary to trace *kuṇḍalinī*'s original meaning and notifications as far back and exactly as possible.

Textual material which teaches yogas or rituals that involve raising the *kuṇḍalinī* has been examined not only by Indologists – whose philological studies tend to come closest to the authentic meanings presented in the Sanskrit sources – but also by a wide range of fields within the academic establishment. The perspectives or methodological and theoretical approaches to these sources, therefore, differs significantly between the individual studies that in some cases (and not in others) contain overlap in regard to contextual meaning, terminological match, and so forth. Instances of discrepancy are presumably due to the much incoherency and diversification in the presentations of *kuṇḍalinī* to be found within the tantric and haṭhayogic scriptures themselves. We are thus not only presented with a large bulk of scriptures describing the *kuṇḍalinī* in various contextual frameworks, but the scholarly approaches from which these Indian religious doctrines and practices are examined also differ significantly. Most scholarship has focused separately either on the *kuṇḍalinī*'s role in terms of Śaiva tantric exegesis or in terms of classical *haṭhayoga* practices. Indeed, the degree of diversity by which this topic has been treated by various scholars is evidence of the fact that over the course of time the idea of *kuṇḍalinī* has gradually infused various areas of religious practice in India, such as sacred symbolism, metaphysical speculation and, later, haṭhayogic practice, and that a fully comprehensive research into the *kuṇḍalinī*'s application, which is currently not existing, is much needed.

With the present thesis I, therefore, wish to test the hypothesis that the original esoteric and cosmogonic perspectives on *kuṇḍalinī* embedded in the Tantras were, to a certain extent, replaced or, at least, less emphasized in classical *haṭhayoga* favoring a predominance of the physiological aspects in its *kuṇḍalinī* practices. Hand in hand with this transformation is the fact that elements of the rituals employed to raise *kuṇḍalinī* were appropriately adjusted to suit the austerities of the haṭhayogins. Hopefully by analyzing, comparing and contrasting more of the many soteriological-based rituals that are integral to the Śaiva Tantras with the *haṭhayoga* techniques, we can create a much clearer and comprehensive picture of the functions of *kuṇḍalinī*. Thus, the primary concerns of this study are threefold: to examine (1) the degree to which *kuṇḍalinī* practices have been influenced by the Hindu theoretical principles of emanation and reabsorption and a microcosmic parallel of the universe's evolution; (2) how the practitioner awakens the slumbering *kuṇḍalinī* to reverse the order of nature on a microcosmic level; and, finally, (3) any explicit commonalities and differences that may occur in the tenets of the *kuṇḍalinī* among various traditions, particularly those between tantric devotees and haṭhayogic practitioners.

In the following pages, I will critically scrutinize the tenets constituting the concept of the *kuṇḍalinī*, which in numerous ways during the transition from the tantric metaphysical rites – such as those related to the Kujikā sect – and the later series of physical exercises forming the major part of *haṭhayoga* became the focal

point of a particular type of yogic practice. The study is presented in four distinct yet closely related parts. Proceeding from the final section of the introduction that traces the etymological meaning and origination of the term *kuṇḍalinī*, the first part examines basic concepts of the Hindu cosmogonic doctrines with particular focus on the segments in which we find early notions of the principles that became the theoretical fundament for the *kuṇḍalinī* practices.

The second part accounts for the Hindu ideas that human beings contain a so-called subtle physiology. Here is argued that these ideas are presented in the tantric sources as a conceptual extension of the early cosmogonic theories, combining the cosmic unfoldment of the divine with the individual's spiritual development in a perfect evolutionary unity. With these inaugurating parameters in mind, I turn in the third part to an elaborate delineation of the various rituals and practices that are applied by yogic practitioners in order to raise *kuṇḍalinī*. This part is broadly divided between rituals that were explicitly sexual orientated and pneumatic- and phonematic-based practices within Tantrism and *haṭhayoga*. In the fourth and final part I put the study of *kuṇḍalinī* into perspective by examining the *kuṇḍalinī* teachings from an analytical perspective by introducing and discussing two discursive approaches borrowed from a Western philosophical framework, namely, epistemology and phenomenology. Furthermore, I expound on the manner in which Hindu *kuṇḍalinī* teachings have been received, approached and, eventually, appropriated in various modern interpretations.

In my closing remarks I attempt to answer the hypothesis, from where the exploration of the present thesis has its point of departure, by concluding that the original tantric *kuṇḍalinī*-teachings pertained to a type of rituals and yogic practices that were grounded in elaborate cosmogonic theories. Hence, by incorporating the cosmogonic theories as the fundamental principles of the different tantric practices, the practitioner would approach the attainment of cosmic consciousness by raising the serpentine energy through an alignment with the various elements and components, which constitute the divine universe. Although the *haṭhayogins* generally did not dismiss tantric doctrines completely, they nevertheless increasingly emphasized the physical methodology and remedial results of raising the *kuṇḍalinī*, meanwhile turning their back on the original theoretical foundation of cosmogony which, it seems, was deserted as a common doctrinal prerequisite taken for granted.

### 3. Methodological considerations

A study such as this into the doctrinal principles and ritual and yogic methods involved in the conceptual model of the *kuṇḍalinī* evokes several methodological considerations. First, there are the presentational concerns in regard to clearly and appropriately structure descriptions and analyses of the subject-matter. This study will pursue to follow terminological and thematic structures of the *kuṇḍalinī* teachings with the general attempt of presenting developments and variations in

terms of the individual religious traditions to be distinguished and the overall chronologic order.

Next, there are the general concerns that face any academic study, namely those regarding proper terminological and categorical clarifications. In order to stabilize a somewhat simplified overview of the diversification that existed among the religious traditions flourishing in medieval India, I choose mainly to make the generalizing distinction between tantric, Nāth and haṭhayogic texts. However, this is not only with the intention to make a comparative study of the different traditions' contribution to the development of the *kuṇḍalinī*, but rather to illustrate general tendencies of the *kuṇḍalinī* as an important shared concept, since in order to properly understand the classical haṭhayogic system of the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening and its appropriation of elements from Tantrism, it necessitates studying the doctrinal theories explicated in the tantric sources. A thorough research must study the available textual material in its religious and traditional contexts.

Another serious methodological consideration is, therefore, to define an approach that avoids a hard dichotomization between the traditional religious presentations. Two approaches are possible and valid when studying the sources that speak of the *kuṇḍalinī*: One is to consider the individual teaching as part of a whole; this is possible since the various expositions rarely conflict directly with each other. The other possibility is to discern in the teachings different schools or systems. Thus, on the one hand we can study each system in the process of its development within the context of *kuṇḍalinī*, while on the other hand we can study the *kuṇḍalinī* templates as a collective development of the various religious traditions.

There are, of course, various limitations and difficulties that face any academic investigation into religious phenomenology as is the case of the *kuṇḍalinī* practices. Perhaps the most crucial barrier for scholarly research, for which there is no easy solution, is that the teachings of the *kuṇḍalinī* form an undeniably esoteric tradition. This attribute of esotericism not alone means the teachings are difficult to grasp intellectually. Indeed, in order to interpret the teachings of the *kuṇḍalinī* properly, one would have to be initiated into the yogic tradition. However, even if it was possible to receive such an initiation, one could not really be certain to understand the meanings and interpretations derived from the initiation and if it would even correspond to the tradition as it was in the medieval centuries.

Hence, if we in our study into these esoteric teachings wish to employ the term *understand* in its commonly accepted denotation: 'to have a thorough technical acquaintance with something,' we immediately encounter an important and central cross-cultural perplexity. I will in this context refer to the great Kashmirian philosopher, Abhinavagupta, who distinguishes between an understanding that is purely intellectual, and one gained from experiential knowledge.<sup>6</sup> A scholarly study, however, cannot insist on such a radical form of understanding. Therefore, this thesis

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva: Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-Dual Shaivism of Kashmir* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 2.

will retain a similar approach to the one that Paul Muller-Ortega adopted for his doctoral thesis entitled *The Triadic Heart of Śiva*, in which he writes:

As a consequence we must here limit the notion of understanding to a form of sympathetic perception through which we attempt to see and feel our way into the still alien universe of tantric *sādhana* (spiritual practice).<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, it would not be appropriate to approach the tantric and haṭhayogic formulations as one would approach a rational system. Rather, in approaching these traditions, we will encounter an intuitional and symbolic method that is the direct outgrowth of the phenomenology of tantric ritualism and yoga. In that regard, this study is an examination of what is a method itself of the attainment of enlightenment experiences.

In this regard I am influenced by the observation of Ninian Smart that metaphysical assertions are often disguised spiritual claims, and that therefore one may not understand a doctrinal scheme without attending to the sometimes complex religious activities, which give it life and point. Smart directly puts the matter thusly:

It involves too the assumption that the determination of metaphysics by forms of religious experience and practice occurs that way round and not conversely. Now it is of course perfectly true that individuals are much influenced by the doctrines which they are taught and in this sense it is certainly true that theology and metaphysics are in some degree determinative of religious experience. ...it would be indeed odd if metaphysics, considered as sets of propositions to be entertained and believed by people, should have the enormous effect of creating out of nothing the powerful religious experience of both great teachers and ordinary folk.<sup>8</sup>

We are thus looking for the description of those experiences occurring in *kuṇḍalinī* insofar as these have been reconstructed through the sources. Our search should therefore lead to the practical-experiential context of the tantric and haṭhayogic corpuses, which is precisely the *kuṇḍalinī* portion.

### ***The study material***

The sources treated in this thesis basically fall into three categories: (1) primary sources, i.e. translations of Sanskrit normative scriptures whether they be the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Tantras, Nāths and *haṭhayoga* manuals, or any other of the original sources to the development of the *kuṇḍalinī* doctrines; (2) academic secondary literature, for example of great scholars such as André Padoux (1990), David G. White (1996), Lilian Silburn (1988), etc., which mainly contains descriptive analyses and discussions of both primary and other secondary sources; and (3) “non-

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<sup>7</sup> Muller-Ortega, *Triadic Heart*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ninian Smart, *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1964), 144.

scholarly” publications which is the rummage box of all the remaining literature that does not fall into the first two categories.

The primary sources, which are mainly composed in Sanskrit, can broadly be distinguished between approximately five types of texts: Chronologically wise, there are first of all scriptures pertaining to the Vedic period (c. 1500-500 BC). These are the Vedas and early Upaniṣads, which provide us the basic, original tenets of later Tantric cosmology. Then, there is the enormous bulk of tantric ritual and exegetical scriptures of various lineages or sub-traditions that primarily span, at least in the context of this thesis, from approximately the 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. The tantric corpus includes especially the Trika exegesis, to which the most prominent contributors are Abhinavagupta’s (fl. c. 975-1025) and his pupil Kṣemarāja (fl. c. 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries). Moreover, this study also treats in some depth the tantric doctrines of the Kubjikā sect and the Śrīvidyā tradition.<sup>9</sup>

Next in the chronological line are the sources which, in a general sense, pertain to the corpus of the Nāths. This includes the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* of Matsyendranātha and the *Gorakṣasaṃhitā* and *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* among other works of Gorakṣanātha.<sup>10</sup> These texts illustrate teachings that partly departure from early medieval Tantrism anchoring in householder ritualism into an ascetic movement of wandering *sādhus* (ascetics). In the 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, a lineage of the Śaiva Tantrism, the South Indian Śāmbhavānanda, taught a yogic practice where the *kuṇḍalinī* ascended through six *cakras*.<sup>11</sup> Presumably, these instructions bridge into the early *haṭhayoga* teachings of that period, which includes the *Śivasamhitā* of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the *Khecarīvidyā* (composed between 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries), two among at least twenty texts from which Svātmārāma borrowed to compile the 15<sup>th</sup>-century *haṭhayoga* anthology, the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*. However, not all early *haṭhayoga* texts had incorporated the concept of raising the *kuṇḍalinī* as a pursued object of yogic practice.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the early *haṭhayogic* practices of the texts mentioned above and of numerous other texts of the ascetic tradition that emerges contemporaneously were combined with tantric metaphysical elements, meditative techniques, and terminologies in the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, which was the first scripture that explicitly set out to teach *haṭhayoga* prior to the other types of yoga.<sup>13</sup> Other considerable texts recognized to be teaching *haṭhayoga* are the *Haṭharatnāvalī* (17<sup>th</sup> century), *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* (18<sup>th</sup> century), etc.

Finally, we need to considerate the *kuṇḍalinī* teachings found in texts such as the *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* of Pūrṇānanda (mid 16<sup>th</sup> century) and the *Pādukāpañcaka* (unknown date), both of which, synthetic in nature, delineate a type of *layayoga* that contains Śāktic elements incorporated into Kaula teachings, although there exist

<sup>9</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 452-62.

<sup>10</sup> Introduction to *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*, pp. 1-11.

<sup>11</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 309.

<sup>12</sup> Mallinson, “Śāktism and *Haṭhayoga*,” 10.

<sup>13</sup> Mallinson, “Śāktism and *Haṭhayoga*,” 15.

*layayoga* teachings in earlier texts than these. The picture presented here of the primary sources is by no means complete or unambiguous, but this scriptural outline can enable us, to some degree at least, to collect the puzzle of the *kuṇḍalinī* teachings in terms of categorical structures and chronological developments.

The third category implies literature that has a pseudo- or quasi-academic approach to sources of all types. Sources of the third category, for instance, include publications by Georg Feuerstein (2001) and Christopher Wallis (2013), the biographical reports by Gopi Krishna (1971, 1972), contemporary research of the humanities into the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening by Lee Sannella (1987) and Sonu Shamdasani (1996), the latter of whom wrote about C.G. Jung's *kuṇḍalinī*-studies.

The contemporary non-scholarly works, including *The Mysterious Kundalini* by Vasant Rele (1960) and *Kundalini, Evolution, and Enlightenment* by John White (1979), depicting the classical *haṭhayoga* schematic of the *kuṇḍalinī* and *cakras* with few or no references to the original sources are too numerous to be discussed in detail in this thesis. Since the focus is on the tantric and *haṭhayogic* sources and scholarship pointing to these original and exegetical expositions of the *kuṇḍalinī*, there is necessarily left out a thorough examination of the publications that present a contemporary appropriation of the yogic *kuṇḍalinī* system.

#### 4. Origin and etymology of the term *kuṇḍalinī*

When we investigate the etymological meaning of the term *kuṇḍalinī*, the literal meaning of the name of goddess Kubjikā (“the Crooked One”), an explicated epithet for goddess Kuṇḍalinī, becomes obvious. However, the synonymous name Kubjikā is merely one among numerous epithets that are attributed to Kuṇḍalinī.<sup>14</sup> A reasonable assumption is put forward by Gudrun Bühnemann, who suggests that the word *kuṇḍalī* or *kuṇḍalinī* derives from the word *kuṇḍala*, “a ring” or “coil.”<sup>15</sup> In this context, we should also consider the word *kuṇḍa*, which means “pit” (for fire) or “well” (for water). In the sense of the former, *kuṇḍalinī* probably alludes to where the spark is generated with the stick that turns before the ritual consecration ceremony, which was superimposed within the subtle body, while in the sense of the latter, *kuṇḍalinī* has a particular reference to the energy centers (*cakras*), which, especially in early yogic scriptures, were metaphorically identified as wells (*kūpas*).<sup>16</sup> Boiled down to their rudimental verb-forms, these various suggestions, I

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 3.104 and the *Haṭharatnāvalī* 2.125-27 for wide accounts of Kuṇḍalinī-epithets.

<sup>15</sup> Gudrun Bühnemann, “The *Śāradātilakatantra* on Yoga: A New Edition and Translation of Chapter 25,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 74 (2011): 228 n. 236, accessed March 25, 2016, doi:10.1017/S0041977X11000036.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* 3.30, where the *viśuddhacakra* is identified as the “throat well” (*kaṇṭha-kūpa*).



would argue, etymologically draw from the roots *kuj* (“to be crooked”), *kuc* and *kuñc* (“bend” or “curl”), and perhaps even from *kūṇ* (“shrink”).<sup>17</sup>

The various attempts made by Western scholars to trace the origin of the term *kuṇḍalinī* or *kuṇḍalī* have not, so far, provided answers that are definite or completely fulfilling. Tracing the origins of the term *kuṇḍalinī* into the Śaiva canon, Gavin Flood cites White, who suggests that the earliest occurrence of the “indwelling serpent” appears in an 8<sup>th</sup>-century Trika text called the *Tantrasadbhāva*, which describes this power as *kuṇḍalī* (“she who is coiled/curved/ring-shaped”).<sup>18</sup> This is also the term encountered in the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya*, which evokes the following goddesses in succession as the mothers (*mātrkāś*) who are identified with the “aggregate of sound” (*śabdarāśi*) located in “all of the knots” (*sarva-grantheṣu*) of the subtle body: Vāmā, Kuṇḍalī, Jyeṣṭhā, Manonmanī, Rudra-śakti, Kāmākhyā, and Ugrāṇī.<sup>19</sup> Presenting the imagery of the *kuṇḍalinī* serpent in everything but in exact name, the same source (17.23) thus describes the goddess named Vāmā as having a circular or serpentine form (*kuṇḍalākṛti*) and extending from the feet to the crown of the head. In this respect the *Tantrasadbhāva* more straightforward equates Kuṇḍalinī with Vāmā and, furthermore, in the same token with Māyā, the veil of illusion that covers the reality of the world.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the identification of the latter with *kuṇḍalinī* is not exceptional to the *Tantrasadbhāva*, since, for instance, later in a discussion of the origin of *mantras* the 10<sup>th</sup>-century *Jayadrathayāmala* (3<sup>rd</sup> hexad) thus related the *kuṇḍalinī* to the goddess Māyā, the phonemes as well as the *kalās*, the body parts of God:<sup>21</sup>

Māyā is the mother of the phonemes and is known as the fire stick of the *mantras*. She is the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti*, and is to be known as the supreme *kalā*. From that spring forth the *mantras* as well as the separate clans, and likewise the Tantras....<sup>22</sup>

When tracing her origin, we discover the *kuṇḍalinī*, in fact, appears prior to the *Tantrasadbhāva* already in the 7<sup>th</sup>-century *Svacchandatantra* (7.19-20), the core text of the *ḍākiṇī*-cult of Bhairava (lit., “terrible”) and a source-text for the

<sup>17</sup> Accordingly Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1899; reprint Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005), 287,3; 287,3; 299,3.

<sup>18</sup> Gavin D. Flood, *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 160.

<sup>19</sup> *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* 20.11-12. When these goddesses are respectively identified with the five lower *cakras* from bottom up, Kuṇḍalī is located between the *svādhiṣṭhāna* and *mūlādhāra*. For a schematic overview, see table 8.1 in David Gordon White, “Yoga in Early Hindu Tantra,” in *Yoga: The Indian Tradition* ed. Ian Whicher and David Carpenter (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 156.

<sup>20</sup> *Tantrasadbhāva* 1.59a; in Dory Heilijgers-Seelen, *The System of Five Cakras in Kubjikāmatatantra 14-16* (Groningen, Netherlands: Egbert Forsten, 1994), 169 n. 60.

<sup>21</sup> In Śaiva rituals, these body parts are superimposed by the devotee upon his own body through the recitation of *mantras*.

<sup>22</sup> In White, “Early Hindu Tantra,” 151-52.

*Tantrasadbhāva*.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, recent research carried out by Christopher Tompkins into some of the earliest Śaiva Siddhānta texts of the Śaivāgama corpus even reveals that the term *kuṇḍalinī*, in fact, already appeared in a single verse of a 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>-century Tantra called *Sārdhatriśatikāllotara*, in which *kuṇḍalinī* is visualized in the region of the heart, after being summoned there from her abode in the crown of the head, where she dwells eternally with Śiva.<sup>24</sup> However, attributing the origin of the term *kuṇḍalinī* to this particular scripture necessitate some precautions, since many of its contemporaneous texts have been lost and, furthermore, the context and the elaborate ways in which the term *kuṇḍalinī* or its characteristics are applied throughout the verses suggest that it was not a new innovative denomination. However, the pertinent verse reads:

The primordial power is *kuṇḍalinī* [when] fused with the sun (*piṅgalā* channel), moon (*iḍā* channel), and fire (*suṣumṇā*). She is to be visualized and experienced in the region of the heart, abiding there in the form of a tongue of flame.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless the verse significantly recalls the later haṭhayogic symbolical terminologies and practices, there are major differences between this teaching and that of the *haṭhayoga* tradition: here, *kuṇḍalinī* does not lie dormant in the shape of a coiled serpent at the base of the spine; rather, she must be summoned from her natural home at the crown of the head in order to rescue the individual soul (*jīva*).<sup>26</sup> In fact, according to Tompkins, the *kuṇḍalinī* is in none of the tantric sources described as lying dormant at the base of the spine.<sup>27</sup> This idea, so commonly found in *haṭhayoga* sources, Wallis argues, would have been absurd to the tāntrikas, for “if *kuṇḍalinī* was dormant you would be in a coma.”<sup>28</sup> Hence, in tantric sources we rather find that the *kuṇḍalinī* resides in the crown of the head, from where she is invited to descend to the relevant center (often the heart, sometimes the *kanda*), creating a rubber-band like tension that then can be used to catapult the soul or individual consciousness up to the highest center.<sup>29</sup> What counts for the early Tantras these characteristics ascribed to the *kuṇḍalinī* may very well be valid, but certainly not in respect to later tantric sources.

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<sup>23</sup> Christopher Tompkins, “The Origins of *Kuṇḍalinī*: A Review of Current Scholarship,” PhD field statement (2008): 11, accessed April 26, 2016, <http://shaivayoga.com/ct/downloads/history-and-evolution-of-chakras-course/>.

<sup>24</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 221.

<sup>25</sup> *candrāgniravisamṃyuktā ādyā kuṇḍalinī tu yā / hr̥tpradeśe tu sā jñeyā aṅkurākāravat-sthitā //* (*Sārdhatriśatikāllotara* 12.1; Christopher Tompkins, “The Original Core Sequence (*Vinyāsa*) of Daily Tantric Yoga (400 – 1300 A.D.),” unpublished paper (2014): 5, accessed April 27, 2016, <http://shaivayoga.com/ct/downloads/history-and-evolution-of-chakras-course/>; tr. Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 221).

<sup>26</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 471 n. 77.

<sup>27</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 478 n. 165.

<sup>28</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 478 n. 165.

<sup>29</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 478 n. 165.

Nevertheless, the basic idea of raising the body's energy through the various subtle centers in order to attain an elevated state of consciousness seems a common concept to all sources that ascribe to the notion of the *kuṇḍalinī*. Thus, by actually using the term *kuṇḍalinī*, but in no case in the haṭhayogic sense of the female serpent energy, the *Kubjikāmata* makes a number of statements that appear to betray the familiarly notion of the serpentine energy. In *Kubjikāmata* 5.84, we read that the “feminine energy (*śakti*) having the form of a sleeping serpent [is located] at the *dvādaśānta*.... Nevertheless, she is also to be found dwelling in the navel.”<sup>30</sup> These characteristics are supposedly precursors of the dynamic role the *kuṇḍalinī* serpent plays in later haṭhayogic sources. Presumably inspired by this text, Abhinavagupta develops this principle in his discussion of the upper (*ūrdhva*-) and lower (*adhah*-) *kuṇḍalinīs*,<sup>31</sup> which are for him two phases of the same energy in expansion and contraction that affects both the descent of transcendent consciousness into the human microcosm, and the ascent of human consciousness upwards its transcendent source.

Returning to the *Sārdhatriśatikāllotara* stanza that precedes 12.1 cited above (see p. 10), we discover some original applications ascribed to the *kuṇḍalinī*.

A lotus with eight petals dwells within the center of the space of the heart. Inside its pericarp, there are four powers, shining with the radiance of the sun, the moon, fire, and gold. The primordial power (*kuṇḍalinī*) of God moves above these four. The soul (individuated consciousness) is concealed there, like a bee, in the heart-lotus with its fourfold power.<sup>32</sup>

That is, the goddess-energy (here called “primordial power”) is summoned to the heart center and fixed there by a fusion of the vital energies, breath, mantric resonance, and concentration of mind. This description resembles *haṭhayoga*, where the retained breath, in-breath (“moon”), and out-breath (“sun”) are energetically fused (*haṭha-yoga*) through the various haṭhayogic techniques that aid to raise *kuṇḍalinī* to the heart before reuniting with Śiva at the crown. The terminologies of breath regulation that frequently appear in *haṭhayoga* instructions are also applied in the *Sārdhatriśatikāllotara*, which explains that “the inhalation and exhalation are held still in the heart (*kumbhaka*)” and that “this [phase of] breath regulation is ‘retention’.”<sup>33</sup> These brief sample passages thus perfectly serve to demonstrate that the yoga taught in the Siddhānta texts is integral to the Tantras as a whole, which went on to influence, if not give rise to, the *haṭhayoga* tradition.

The role of the serpent as a symbol and figure in the Indian mindset has become established through a long term process enduring since, and probably earlier than, Vedic times, which included iconographies, mythological narratives and a

<sup>30</sup> In White, “Early Hindu Tantra,” 150.

<sup>31</sup> See below, Part IV, sec. 1, 57.

<sup>32</sup> In Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 221.

<sup>33</sup> *pidhāya sarvadvārāṇi niśvāsocchvāsavarjitāḥ / sampūrṇakumbhavat-tiṣṭhet-prāṇāyāmaḥ sa kumbhakaḥ ||* (*Sārdhatriśatikāllotara* 11.13; tr. Tompkins, “Daily Tantric Yoga,” 4).

comprehensive development of ascribed attributions. These attributed characteristics of the serpent as well as other symbolic figures and items were employed in medieval texts teaching the *kuṇḍalinī*-method, in fact, to the extent that the serpent with all its attributes became the very emblem for this type of yogic practice. Indubiously, the symbolic means along with commonly acknowledged characteristics and values applied in *kuṇḍalinī*-teachings were appealing to the practitioner's imaginative and conceptual understanding of the transformation he/she attempted to attain.

## PART I

# Hindu Cosmogonic Theories

### 1. The aggregate of cosmos

In order to enter further into an examination of the *kuṇḍalinī* we must explore the wider context of the doctrines that were the principle foundation for *kuṇḍalinī* practices and rituals. The *kuṇḍalinī* practices as complex and as powerful as those utilized by the Śaivas neither developed nor were applied in a conceptual void. Here we encounter one of the earliest most explicit and sophisticated theoretical formulations, namely that of the cosmic evolution. Probably the most pervasive and persistent of all the conceptual constructs by far is that which treats of the multivalent relationship between the individual and the world, the microcosm and the macrocosm. In regard to cosmology, which was a major doctrinal constituent of Kashmir Śaivism, Wallis summarizes the vision of the universe by Abhinavagupta in this way:

All that exists and has ever existed is one infinite divine consciousness, free and blissful, which projects within the field of its awareness a vast multiplicity of apparently differentiated subjects and objects, each object and actualization of a potential inherent in the divine light of consciousness (*prakāśa* = Śiva) and each subject a contracted locus of self-awareness (*vimarśa* = śakti). This projection, a divine play (*krīḍā*), is the result of the impulse (*icchā*) within the divine to express the totality of its self-knowledge (*jñāna*) in action (*kriyā*).<sup>34</sup>

That is, the three powers (*śaktis*) – *icchā* (will), *jñāna* (knowledge) and *kriyā* (act or action) – constitute the threefold dynamic that inheres Śiva's projection. The universal unfoldment, in this context, can be analyzed into three stages: Existence emerges through an act of will, with action as its immediate instrumental cause and knowledge of its application as the intermediary between the will to create and the act itself. The power of action, furthermore, coincides with the withdrawal of self-awareness into the divine light. Hence, the cosmic evolution is not considered to be linear but a cyclic process of an ever flow of creation and destruction occurring simultaneously. Thus, the intent on making an object manifest, the actual act of manifestation and the manifest state are the results of these three types of *śakti*, which represents the beginning, middle and end of all things, held together as aspects of the cyclic universal flow of divine Śiva-consciousness.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Christopher D. Wallis, "The Descent of Power: Possession, Mysticism, and Initiation in the Śaiva Theology of Abhinavagupta," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36(2) (2008): 248-49.

<sup>35</sup> Dyczkowski, *Doctrine of Vibration*, 84-98.

According to the tantric ontology, the threefold power by which the universe emerges becomes limited when embodying a human being. The emanation of the three *śaktis* is alluded to in the *Brahmayāmalatantra*, highlighting *kuṇḍalinī* as the supreme goddess power to be recognized as the creative force within the subtle body.

She is of a pale white light; she is like crystalline rays in form. She is the *śakti* that has come forth through his (Śiva's) desire. Her form is knowledge; she is beyond the mind; she is said to be vibrating. Her existence is without [a definable] appearance...she, being endless, causes to awake (within the human being) in an instant *bindu* (consciousness; lit., "spot") and *nāda* (sound-energy). She exists in a coiled shape (*kuṇḍalākṛti*). She exists within the 16 vowels...thus she (the supreme goddess in this aspect) is *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* (the coiled energy).<sup>36</sup>

The *tāntrikas* held that through various ritual means, the worshipper could permanently encompass the constituent principles of the universe. According to White's termination, from the threefold configuration of human + mediating structure + divine the microcosm, mesocosm, and macrocosm are thus respectively distinguished.<sup>37</sup> This aggregate of microcosm-mesocosm-macrocosm is interesting and useful due to the interrelation between and the possibility of exchange among the three levels, which furthers the human potential to elevate mundane perception upto the state of cosmic consciousness and, accordingly, to realize the true self. The metaphysical principals of the *kuṇḍalinī* practice that followed this system of thought, indeed, aim at connecting and balancing the discrete aspects of the individual in order for him to recognize his universal affiliation.

## 2. The cosmic evolutionary cycle

A basic cosmogonic tenet for many Hindu schools is denoted by Richard Davis as "the oscillating universe."<sup>38</sup> That is, the universe as we know it undergoes an endless cycle of creations and destructions. A period of cessation or sleep follows, and then the cosmos begins its evolution again in the next cycle. The fluctuating movement between moments of creation and destruction, evolution and involution, activity and quietude, expansion and contraction, etc. is the concept Davis alludes to by his denotation. However, this pulsation does not confine itself to the cosmogonic motion, rather, as Davis states, "it is a ubiquitous principle of a dynamic universe,

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<sup>36</sup> *jyotsnārūpā svarūpeṇa sphaṭikasyeva raśmayāḥ / tasyecchānirgatā śaktir jñānarūpā manonmanī // pravartate nirābhāsā avadhūteṭi sā smṛtā / prabodhayati sānantā bindunāḍau kṣaṇena tu // kuṇḍalākṛtisamstānā svarāḍau saṃvyavasthītā / evaṃ kuṇḍalinīśaktiḥ svaraiḥ ṣoḍaśabhiḥ sthitāḥ / catuṣkapaṭhakopetā pañcavyomālankṛtā //* (*Brahmayāmala* 1.127-30; tr. Tompkins, "Origins of *Kuṇḍalinī*," 24-25).

<sup>37</sup> David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 15.

<sup>38</sup> Richard H. Davis, *Rituals in an Oscillating Universe: Worshipping Śiva in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 42.

governing all creation.”<sup>39</sup> This description frames appropriately the tantric ontological notion that characteristics of the subtle energy within man identified as *kuṇḍalinī* mirror the creative, pulsating force of the cosmos.

In Śaiva terminologies the cosmic evolutionary dynamic (*spanda*) was described in the paired concepts of “emission” (*śṛṣṭi*) and “reabsorption” (*saṁhāra*), which were imbedded as the organizing logic in their patterning of worship. These principles have several important ramifications. Emission indicates a general movement from subtle and relatively intangible to gross and relatively tangible; reabsorption the reverse. Emission moves from pure to impure, whereas reabsorption moves from impure to pure. Emission and reabsorption relate as well to man’s disposition in the universe. The path of emission is often represented visually as a descending motion from high to low, or as a radiating movement proceeding outward from a center toward peripheries. Reabsorption ascends or moves inwards towards a center. These two terms of the evolutionary activity – emission and reabsorption – are conjoined by the idea that manifestation in a course of time is subjected to “preservation” or “maintenance” (*sthiti*), a term which denotes an activity of stabilization or stasis.<sup>40</sup> By comparing the two cosmic theories briefly outlined above, we thus see that the microcosm-mesocosm-macrocosm aggregate addresses the evolutionary process occurring in the infinite cosmic space, while the cyclic model of emission-preservation-reabsorption rather points to the Hindu principals of the cosmogonic evolutionary process, which occurs in the continuum of space-time.

### 3. The cosmic emanation

There is nothing directly tantric in Vedic and Vedāntic literature. However, a number of Vedic elements (as will become clearer in the following pages) have survived and were even sometimes innovated intensely in tantric texts. Explaining the principal elements which the earliest Tantras adapted from Vedic literature, Padoux thus writes:

It appears somehow as preserving and reviving that which was most alive in Vedism. Such is the case, for instance, with regard to the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm, to the correlations – which are actually identifications – that Tantrism establishes between man and the cosmos, gods and rites. These ancient correspondences are further elaborated and organized into a system where all is interconnected, where there is an interplay between the different levels in each field, where energy is both cosmic and human, and therefore where microcosm, reenacting macrocosm, becomes identified with it and, by means of symbolic efficacy, is able to influence it.... The cosmic manifestation and

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<sup>39</sup> Davis, *Oscillating Universe*, 42.

<sup>40</sup> Davis, *Oscillating Universe*, 43.

man's bondage in the world, cosmic resorption and deliverance from the cycle of births...are two movements of the same energy.<sup>41</sup>

The Vedic cosmogonic concept of an energetic parallel within man of the universal, creative pulsation is adapted by the *tātrikas* as an underlying doctrinal principle partially in their rites, yogic practices and speculative systems, which involve the notion of the *kuṇḍalinī*. Her straight form is thus considered to be "acosmic." Only by assuming her crooked or bent form does she generate the cosmic order.<sup>42</sup> Thus, at the ground zero of the self-emission of the absolute's emergence into phenomenal existence, she takes pleasure as she allows the microcosmic life-force to drain away into her sleeping mouth. Her awakening from the microcosmic level, on the other hand, is the beginning of the withdrawal into the absolute from which manifestation originally emitted.

The coherence of the macrocosm and microcosm found its way into yogic practice, where the yogin by raising *kuṇḍalinī* through breathing-techniques applied vehicles by which to raise himself from mundane existence.<sup>43</sup> This appropriation of the macro-microcosmic perspective into yoga teachings is evident in the commentary to the *Mālinīstava* proclaiming that the *kuṇḍalinī*, in her manifestation of the goddess called the "Crooked One" (*kuṭilā*), "brings about emanation and withdrawal by the movement of the two breaths (*prāṇa* and *apāna*)."<sup>44</sup>

### ***The emanation of the life-force and vital breath***

One of the characteristics of Tantrism lies in the attempt to constantly establish correspondences between the human being, rites, and cosmos, and in the cosmic as well as human aspects of energy. Those correspondences are not peculiar to Tantrism, but, on the contrary, are traceable, for instance, in the *Atharva Veda*:

For all deities are seated in humans as cows in a cow-stall. Therefore one who knows human beings thinks: "This is Brahman."<sup>45</sup>

The idea behind this analogy is that the single originator of the universe is identical with those powers illustrated by the deities that make human beings alive. This cosmic and human energy was symbolized in Tantrism especially by the *kuṇḍalinī* appearing at the same time as life-force (*prāṇa*), vital breath (*vāyu*), and speech

<sup>41</sup> André Padoux, *Vāc: The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras* (Albany: SUNY, 1990), 37.

<sup>42</sup> Mark S.G. Dyczkowski, *Manthānabhairavatantram Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ: The Section Concerning the Virgin Goddess of the Tantra of the Churning Bhairava*, 6 vols. – *Introduction, Myth, History and Doctrine of the Goddess Kūbjikā* (Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2009), 1:269 n. 1.

<sup>43</sup> White, *Alchemical Body*, 219-20.

<sup>44</sup> *kuṭilā iti kuṇḍalinī I (...) paramēśvarīm kuṭilā prāṇāpānagatyā śṛṣṭisamhāraṃ karoti I (Tīkā 173b; tr. Dyczkowski, Manthānabhairavatantram Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ – Introduction, 1:269 n. 1).*

<sup>45</sup> *Atharva Veda* 11.8.32; tr. Padoux, *Vāc*, 24.



(*vāc*), three terminologies which heavily imbued Vedic eschatology and mythology. *Prāṇa* had aspects of a cosmic as well as a physiological principle in Vedic thought, which retained a significant component as a psychosomatic principle in later tantric concepts about the subtle body.<sup>46</sup> For instance, Ṛg Vedic statements such as “along the wind’s course they (i.e., the *munis*) glide when the gods have penetrated [them]” and “upon the winds we have ascended” are easily interpreted as early analogies to later yogic notions of *prāṇāyāma* breathing.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps even more obvious are the similarities to *kuṇḍalinī* practice in the following extract of the *Ṛg Veda*:

Through the mid-region (*antarikṣa*) flies the sage illuminating all forms (...). The wind’s steed, Vāyu’s friend, is the god-intoxicated sage; within both oceans he dwells, the upper and the lower. In the paths of *apsarases* (female spirits), *gandharvas* (male spirits), and beast wanders the long-hair knower of thoughts (...). For him has Vāyu churned and pounded the badly bent one (*kunamnamā*), when the long-hair drank with Rudra from the poison cup.<sup>48</sup>

It is not clear what is meant by the “badly bent one” (*kunamnamā*) in the concluding stanza, since this is the only place where this word appears. Feuerstein reasonably suggests that it may be the “gross aspect” of the human body-mind, and perhaps even an early reference to the dormant psycho-spiritual power of the human body, which later came to be known as the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti*, or to the later goddess Kubjikā.<sup>49</sup> Another striking comparison from the citation above can be made to a section of the *Tantrasadbhāva* cited by Kṣemarāja in the *Śivasūtravimarśinī* 2.3, in which the *kuṇḍalinī* is awakened through a churning of the union of Śiva and Śakti.<sup>50</sup>

However, that there was a subtle connection between breath and speech was particularly emphasized in the Upaniṣads. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.19 equates breath to the power of speech, as does the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (perhaps 6<sup>th</sup> century BC). The latter declares in 1.1.5-6 that the pair of breath and speech joined together is the syllable *om*.<sup>51</sup> The *Maitrī Upaniṣad* 6.3-5 (perhaps 1<sup>st</sup> century BC), which probably is the most recent among the Upaniṣads, contains a section that considers *om* in some detail. Herein we find that, through yoga practices consisting of six *aṅgas* (limbs) including breath regulation, etc., there occurs a fuse between breath and the syllable *om* within the subtle medial channel (*suṣumṇā*) located at the spinal column, a phenomenon which leads to liberation.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey Samuel and Jay Johnston, eds., *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body* (N.Y., USA: Routledge, 2013), 34.

<sup>47</sup> *Ṛg Veda* 10.136,2-3; tr. Feuerstein, *Yoga Tradition*, 113.

<sup>48</sup> *Ṛg Veda* 10.136,4-7; tr. Feuerstein, *Yoga Tradition*, 113-14.

<sup>49</sup> Feuerstein, *Yoga Tradition*, 113.

<sup>50</sup> *Śivasūtravimarśinī* 2.3, p. 93.

<sup>51</sup> Tompkins, “Origins of *Kuṇḍalinī*,” 5.

<sup>52</sup> Tompkins, “Origins of *Kuṇḍalinī*,” 6.

### *The emanation through sound*

The ancient description perceiving the universe to be basically a sound manifestation from subtle to gross was adapted in the tantric teachings of yoga which involved the establishment in sound and the rise of *kuṇḍalinī*. For instance, having ascribed the subtle sound (*nāda*) to *kuṇḍalinī*, the *Manthānabhairavatantram Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ* explains her location is in the middle of the navel.<sup>53</sup> With the *kuṇḍalinī* entering the navel, the yogin through intense practice acquires the possession of her qualities, the supernatural powers (*siddhis*) and, in turn, the knowledge of all things in past, present and future.<sup>54</sup>

Upaniṣadic as well as Vedic speculations about the universal sound of the syllable *om* have more features which will appear afterwards in elaborate form in tantric texts. For instance, the image of the sleeping *kuṇḍalinī* coiled three and a half times around an internal *liṅga* (phallus) frequently figuring in tantric sources recalls the Upaniṣadic idea that the sound *om* was made up of three and one-half elements, which was achieved by breaking up *om* into the three phonemes *a*, *u*, and *m* and adding an elided *m*.<sup>55</sup> In tantric teachings *kuṇḍalinī* is described ascending with the vital breath in an inner impulse that infuses life in the body in a movement of twelve stages during the emission of *om*. The first three of the stages are concerned with the sounding of the three phonemes *a*, *u*, and *m* as *kuṇḍalinī* rises through the median way. The three phonemes are respectively situated in the heart, throat, and at the vault of the palate.<sup>56</sup>

The Śaiva tantric tradition, especially the Trika, describes the manifestation of the universe to be an evolutionary movement of simultaneously a flashing forth of pure light (*prakāśa*) and a luminous vibration (*spanda*). This vibrating effulgence is regarded as that of sound or word on its ultimate stage (*parāvāc*) of consciousness (*cit*). Manifestation occurs through a series of transformations and condensations of sound or phonic primal energy, which gradually brings forth the manifested universe into a process that is analogous in human beings. The evolutionary steps, in regard to the emergence of sound through a gradual process from subtle to gross, is terminologically explained in the 12<sup>th</sup>-century *Śāradātilaka*. In summary, it describes that the evolutionary process occurs in a sequence beginning with the supreme Lord or *kalā*,<sup>57</sup> wherefrom is born the phonic energy; again thereof emerges the *nāda*-sound. Then out of *nāda*, *bindu*, which divides into three portions called *bindu*, *nāda*, and *bīja*. Eventually, out of the threefold division comes *śabdabrahman* into existence and assumes the form of the *kuṇḍalinī*, from which arises the phonemes

<sup>53</sup> *Manthānabhairavatantram Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ* 40.92cd-94ab, 4:255.

<sup>54</sup> *Manthānabhairavatantram Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ* 40.102-104ab, 4:257.

<sup>55</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 19.

<sup>56</sup> Lilian Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī: The Energy of Depths* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 49. By means of these three cavities – heart, throat, and palate where the yogin perceives the mind, intellect and ego respectively – the individual soul, transported by the *kuṇḍalinī*'s ascent, leaves the body (Dyczkowski, *Manthānabhairavatantram Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ – Notes on Text and Translation*, 4:24 n. 24).

<sup>57</sup> Abhinavagupta explains that there exists a seventeenth *kalā*, which is the *kuṇḍalinī* (Padoux, *Vāc*, 91).

(*varṇas*),<sup>58</sup> then speech; the gods, then the elements and the empirical world. The sound-energy continually moves on, bringing the whole emanation into existence, from the primary principle, transcendent and yet endowed with an urge towards manifestation (*sakala*).<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, the *kuṇḍalinī* process within the human body, which is considered identical with the cosmos, parallels this cosmogonic evolution. Thus as she manifests in the form of phonic energy rising from the *mūlādhāra*, the *kuṇḍalinī*, although ever pure, is said to be tinged with latent impressions (*saṃskāras*) and differentiating into *śabda* (“sound,” “word,” or “speech”) and *artha* (“object” or “meaning”).<sup>60</sup> Hence the universal evolution is described as both a cosmic process and the process of the emergence of speech in human beings, since the movement of creation and reabsorption of the phonic energy is linked to the movement of the *kuṇḍalinī*.

Identifying *kuṇḍalinī* with the subtle energy of the phonemes, the *Śāradātilaka* explains that she, being immanent to the universe, is playing a cosmic role. Thus in a passage, where the *kuṇḍalinī* is seen to move through the stages of the emanation of the sound energy, the text elaborates that

The lady of the universe, the *kuṇḍalinī*, consisting of the *śabdabrahman*, the supreme, produces *śakti*. From that (*śakti*) [she produces] sound (*dhvani*); from that (sound), resonance/sound (*nāda*); from that (resonance/sound), *nirodhikā*; from that (*nirodhikā*), the half moon (*ardhendu*); from that (half moon), the drop (*bindu*).<sup>61</sup> From that (drop) *parā* originates, then that *paśyantī*, the one signifying *madhyamā* [and] *vaikharī*, which [are the four levels of speech that] give birth to words, – the *kuṇḍalī* in the form of light, consisting of [the three powers,] will (*icchā*), knowledge (*jñāna*) and action (*kriyā*), who consist of the [three] qualities, emanates in this sequence the series of syllables (i.e., the alphabet) from *a* to *sa*, consisting of the forty-two [syllables of the *bhūtalipi*]. When fiftyfold she gives birth to the series of fifty syllables [of the alphabet and] in sequence to the *kalās*, [the gods such as] Rudra and the others, which are identical to the syllables of that (alphabet) [and the rest of the cosmos].<sup>62</sup>

In this manner phonemes appear in various ways in relation to the various stages of the manifestation of sound. According to the *Śāradātilaka* 1.53-57 the *kuṇḍalinī*,

<sup>58</sup> The term *varṇa*, which first of all refers to “color,” is usually employed in Tantras and by Kashmirian Śaiva authors to indicate the Sanskrit phonemes.

<sup>59</sup> *Śāradātilaka* 1.7-8.

<sup>60</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 226.

<sup>61</sup> *Śakti*, *dhvani* (“spontaneous sound”), *nāda*, *nirodhikā* (“subtle energy of sound”), *ardhendu* and *bindu* are states of the *kuṇḍalinī* in the *mūlādhāra*.

<sup>62</sup> *sā prasūte kuṇḍalinī śabdabrahmamayī vibhuḥ / śaktim tato dhvanis tasmān nādas tasmān nirodhikā // tato ‘rdhendus tato bindus tasmād āsīt parā tataḥ / paśyantī madhyamāvāci vaikharī śabdajanmabhūḥ / icchājñānakriyātmāsau tejorūpā guṇātmikā // krameṇānena sṛjati kuṇḍalī varṇamālikām / akārādisakārāntām dvicatvāriṃśadātmikām // pañcāśadvāraguṇitā pañcāśadvarṇamālikām // sūte tadvarṇato ‘bhinnāḥ kalā rudrādikān kramāt //* (*Śāradātilaka* 1.108-11).

despite being universal and all-pervading, assumes the form of the fifty phonemes when lying coiled around the *bindu* in the *mūlādhāra*.

The term *bhūtalipi* (lit., “demon-writing” or “writing of the elements”), regarded as a *mantra* containing the most essential aspect of all phonemes, plays a special role in the worship of the *śrīcakra*-deities such as described in the *Yoginīhrdaya* (probably 12<sup>th</sup> century). A commentator to this text, Amṛtānanda (14<sup>th</sup> century), explains that *bhūtalipi* appears when the *kuṇḍalinī*, rising from the *mūlādhāra*, pierces the *granthis* and *cakras* tied along the *suṣumṇā*.<sup>63</sup> *Cakras* neither revolve nor vibrate in ordinary persons, but tend to form inextricable tangles of coils called “knots” (*granthis*) in that they knot spirit and matter. Each knot regains its universality when pierced during a process where the *kuṇḍalinī* ascends through the middle channel or *suṣumṇā*.<sup>64</sup> This process is an imaginative engagement on the psychosomatic plane, connecting the vibrating subtle body to the static gross one or, in other words, the level of the macrocosm to that of the microcosm. As such is this process (as well as that explained the *Śāradātilaka*-passage (1.108-11) quoted above (see, p. 19) a continuation in a human being of the cosmic emanating movement that endows him with all the levels of the phonic energy, which, however, is both human and cosmic. In simple words, the cosmogonic stages are repeated by the *kuṇḍalinī* at the microcosmic level.

A different exposition of the phonic creative progression that issues from the *kuṇḍalinī* is found in the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* 3.8-11, an early text pertaining to the Trika school. Having assumed the form of the three powers – *icchā*, and so forth – and the nature of mother (*mātr̥bhāva*) by dividing herself into the series of phonemes, *kuṇḍalinī*, according to this Tantra, reaches down by means of further divisions and to the multiplicity of created objects. Initially twofold in this unfoldment, she splits into seed (*bīja*) and womb (*yonī*), which respectively correspond to the vowels and the consonants, or to Śiva and Śakti.<sup>65</sup> Hence, her twofold division represents the commencement of creation as it comes into being through the conjunction of the natures of the masculine and feminine. In regard to the three powers, the Śaivas contend that as *kuṇḍalinī* descends she manifests progressively at each turn as them. Conversely, when ascending she first manifests as the energy of action, then knowledge and, finally, as the omnipotent will of the transmental to merge into her basic coiled nature. The *kuṇḍalinī* thus ascends and descends in a spiral motion in three great loops, whereas in her sleeping repose she is said to enclose the three energies in a potential state.<sup>66</sup>

The four levels of speech – *parā*, and so forth – through which cosmic sound and accordingly human speech gradually manifest correspond respectively to four goddesses, who are often identified as Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā, Raudrī and Ambikā. As such, these four goddesses represent four divinized energies (*śaktis*) of creation

<sup>63</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 149 n. 174.

<sup>64</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 26.

<sup>65</sup> In Padoux, *Vāc*, 153-54.

<sup>66</sup> Dyczkowski, *Manthānabhairavatantram Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ – Notes*, 1:162 n. 158.

functioning as partial manifestations of the *kuṇḍalinī* in the initial phase of the process of phonic manifestation. During this process, the four goddesses operate at a stage before the appearance of audible sound. In the first chapter of the *Tantrasadbhāva* (1.217-30) this development of the *kuṇḍalinī* is described in order to explain the goddesses' presence in sound. According to the text, in shape of a sleeping snake that encloses the heart-*bindu* (i.e., Śiva) the *kuṇḍalinī* is without any thought; as such she is implicitly known as Vāmā. Awaken by a subtle sound in the form of knowledge, she, in association with Jyeṣṭhā, raises herself and by union with Śiva becomes straight. After this stage she becomes threefold, known as *tripathā* ("having three parts") and named Raudrī.<sup>67</sup> Finally, in form of a fragment of the moon, *kuṇḍalinī* is identified with Ambikā, who is the *ardhacandra* or *ardhendu* (see citation above, p. 19).<sup>68</sup>

### *The emanation of consciousness*

The appearance of human consciousness follows the cosmic evolutionary progression of emanation, maintenance, reabsorption, and its corresponding theory of the microcosm-mesocosm-macrocosm aggregate. Correspondingly, the Śaivas distinguish between three ascending levels of consciousness – *vyāpinī*, *samanā*, and *unmanā* – that are characterized as types of sonic energy. In the order of cosmic emanation, *unmanā* appears first: this is the "transmental" or "superconscious" level, in which there is complete union with Śiva. Next comes *samanā*, the "conscious," which is intermediate and transcendent. The energy of the universe at this level is held within itself in a latent state. As for *vyāpinī*, the "pervading" awareness, it is the energy immanent to the human being, whom it pervades and gives life to.

In the instant of manifestation consciousness in its pure essence is gradually reduced within the limited confines of human awareness as the cosmic emission unfolds. In this regard, the superconscious state of *unmanā* presumably refers to a point in which the universe is still unmanifest, and therefore outside the range of experience to the ordinary human potential. The movement which enlivens the energy from *samanā* and *vyāpinī* onwards is the union of Śiva and Śakti, bringing about the awakening of the *kuṇḍalinī*. This movement is a sonic vibration that exists on all three levels of consciousness; therefore the yogin's utterance (*uccāra*) of the *bījamantra* (e.g., *OM*, *HAUM*, *HRĪM*, etc.), which is linked to the upward movement of the breath energy, will eventually reach the *unmanā* and, in turn, subside into Śiva.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> These first three goddesses – Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā and Raudrī – are associated respectively with the *icchā*-, *jñāna*- and *kriyāśaktis* (see above, pp. 13 and 19) as well as with the three cosmic functions of emission, maintenance and reabsorption (see above, Part I, sec. 2, 14-15) (Heilijgers-Seelen, *System of Five Cakras*, 168 n. 54).

<sup>68</sup> Heilijgers-Seelen, *System of Five Cakras*, 169.

<sup>69</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 94-96 and 96-97 n. 30.

#### 4. Cosmological diagrammatic: The *śrīcakra*

The representation of creation is a common convention in Indian visual arts, and is an important principle in Śāktic rituals. Perhaps the most famous visual element in all of Hindu Tantrism is the *śrīcakra* or *śrīyantra* of the Śrīvidyā school, the most widespread and enduring Śāktic tradition. This sacred diagram's symbolism of the cyclic movement of the universe both illustrates cosmic evolution and man's spiritual quest. In respect to the manifest universe, *śrīcakra*'s identity with *śakti*, the energy within man identified as *kuṇḍalinī* that follows a process paralleling the cosmic evolution, appears in a statement of the *Yoginīhṛdaya*:

When she, the supreme *śakti*, out of her own will [assumes] the form of the universe, observing her own self-effusion (*sphurattama*), the [*śrī*]*cakra* emerges.<sup>70</sup>

To understand the cosmological event of expansion is thus, for the adept, to participate in it and to develop a method for identifying with this transcendent form of *śakti*. The *śrīcakra* (fig. 1; see next page) is composed of nine large or major intersecting triangles surrounded by two sets of lotus petals. In the center of the triangles is a drop (*bindu*). The *śrīcakra* is interpreted “from inside out,” i.e., following the so-called “emission sequence” or *śṛṣṭi-krama* that parallels the process of creation. While the *śrīcakra* is in actuality the confluence of Śakti and Śiva, the representation of the conjugal union that creates the universe, Śakti alone is the presiding deity of the central *bindu* point established in the middle of the innermost minor of the nine triangles, the *bindu-cakra* or *trikoṇa*. The individual's true self-identity (*ātman*) is to be located here at the center of the *śrīcakra*, symbolizing an expansion not only of the basic principles and elements of the universe but also of the human body and consciousness.

The crucial macro-microcosmic connection between the *śrīcakra* and the Śrīvidyā adept is furthered in a process of ritual worship and contemplation, which includes *kuṇḍalinī* practice and such related disciplines as breath control (*prāṇāyāma*) in order to dissolve false distinctions that arise from human ignorance. Indeed, as contemplative worship (*upāsana*) dissolves false distinctions and the adept's latent spiritual nature, *kuṇḍalinī*, ascends within the body, so the adept ritually ascends the *śrīcakra*. The crucial macrocosmic/microcosmic connection between the *śrīcakra* and the Śrīvidyā adept is furthered in a process of ritual worship and contemplation, which includes *kuṇḍalinī* practice and such related disciplines as breath control (*prāṇāyāma*) in order to dissolve false distinctions that arise from human ignorance. Indeed, as contemplative worship (*upāsana*) dissolves false distinctions and the adept's latent spiritual nature, *kuṇḍalinī*, ascends within the body, so the adept ritually ascends the *śrīcakra*. Beginning at the outside of the *śrīcakra*, the adept traces the process of creation in reverse. He proceeds not from the “inside out” (i.e. beginning, as in emission, from the *bindu*) but from the “outside in” (i.e., from points

<sup>70</sup> *yadā sā paramā śaktiḥ svecchayā viśvarūpiṇī || sphutattām ātmanah paśyet tadā cakrasya sambhavaḥ* / (*Yoginīhṛdaya* 1.9b-10a).

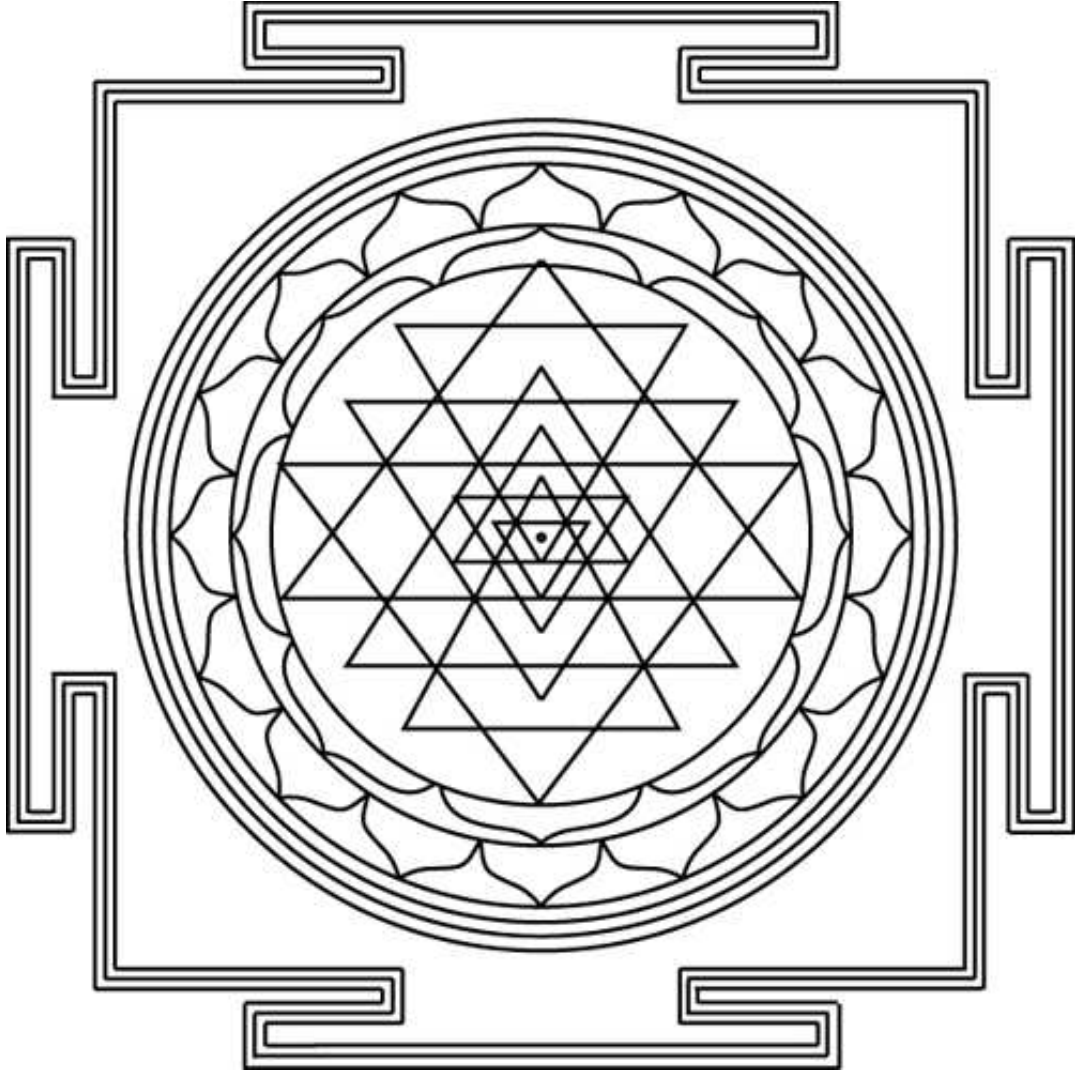


Figure 1 – *Śrīcakra* according to the *Yoginīhṛdaya* ch. 1<sup>71</sup>

on the periphery towards the *bindu*).<sup>72</sup> In persisting that the liturgy follows this procedure, the adept ritually reverse creation rather than simply reenacting it.<sup>73</sup>

Eclipsing the traditions that nurtured its development (i.e., the Trika and Kubjikā sects), the Śrīvidyā became very successful and widespread throughout India. When the Trika eventually disappeared in the south, it nevertheless survived there through

<sup>71</sup> This diagram, based on the rendition in André Padoux and Roger-Orphe Jeanty, *The Heart of the Yoginī: Yoginīhṛdayam – A Sanskrit Tantric Treatise* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 28-29, is a copy courtesy of the *śrīcakra* found at “Graphic Design,” CONNIELEEMARIE.COM, accessed April 29, 2016, <http://www.connieleemarie.com/library/July-29-2013.html>.

<sup>72</sup> D.F. Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 110-11.

<sup>73</sup> This is a.k.a. the process of dissolution (*layayoga*) (see below, Part III, sec. 3, 49-51).

the incorporation of the principle *mantra* (SAUḤ) of goddess Parādevī (a *mantra* also employed to awaken the *kuṇḍalinī*) into the core of the Śrīvidyā liturgy.<sup>74</sup>

## 5. The micro-macrocosmic tenets in Nāth and *haṭhayoga* texts

Gorakṣanātha's writings reveal extensive awareness to the connection between the cosmic landscape and the human subtle autonomy. Especially his *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* is devoted to expound on the body's (*piṇḍa*) origin and role in both cosmic and soteriological perspectives. *Śakti*, identified as the primordial power that constitute the basis of all creation, functions through her five evolutes: *nijā* (innate or constant), *parā* (superior), *aparā* (inferior), *sūkṣmā* (subtle), and *kuṇḍalī*. The teachings of the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*, tantric in nature, aim at realizing identity in unity of the world and the yogin's interior symbolized by the fusion of Śiva (*akula*) and *śakti* (*kula*). The sleeping and awakening aspects of the *kuṇḍalinī* are explained in detail in connection with the cosmic evolution: When *kuṇḍalinī* is raised, the expanded *śakti* turns into a creative primus motor for cosmic manifestation; whereas when she coils, the contracted *śakti* parallels the dissolution of the world. According to the subtle body-locations of *śakti* at the *mūlādhāra*, *hṛdaya*, and *sahasrāra* the *kuṇḍalinī* is respectively called *adhaḥ* ("below"), *madhya* ("center"), and *ūrdhva* ("above").<sup>75</sup> The first aspect ensures the practitioner's connection to the external world. The second is either lower and gross or higher and subtle which, respectively, furthers grounding or salvation. The third is for the attainment of the final beatitude (*paramapada*).<sup>76</sup>

Something else is presented in the *Gorakṣapaddhati* that became influential for later *haṭhayoga* literature borrowing numerous of its stanzas. Entirely devoted to the six limbs of yoga starting with the postures, it teaches widely on the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening but nothing of the micro-macrocosmic theories.<sup>77</sup> As such, the text perfectly illustrates the tendency of classical *haṭhayoga* instructions to skip the theoretical aspects, presumably, both for the sake of brevity and to keep focus on the quintessence of *haṭhayoga*, namely, yogic exertion and meditative exercise. Furthermore, the *Gorakṣapaddhati* associates the three vessels of the subtle body, *idā*, *piṅgalā*, and *suṣumnā*, respectively with the deities of moon, sun, and fire.<sup>78</sup> However, the impression of these identifications, as in later *haṭhayoga* teachings, appears symbolical, rather than illustrations of explicit micro-macrocosmic doctrines.

<sup>74</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 280-81.

<sup>75</sup> For more on the practical aspects of the *adhaḥ*- and *ūrdhvakūṇḍalinīs*, see below, Part IV, sec. 1, 56.

<sup>76</sup> *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*, p. 41.

<sup>77</sup> *Gorakṣapaddhati*; tr. Feuerstein, *Yoga Tradition*, 401-19.

<sup>78</sup> *Gorakṣapaddhati* 1.32; tr. Feuerstein, *Yoga Tradition*, 404. In other *haṭhayoga* texts these three *nāḍīs* are identified by the rivers Gaṅgā, Yamunā, and Sarasvatī, respectively.



In comparison to the Vedic and tantric scriptures the treatment of cosmology are scarce in the *haṭhayoga* corpus, nevertheless not complete absent. A survey into two of the at least twenty texts that Svātmārāma used to compile his *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, the *Khecarīvidyā* and *Śivasamhitā*, illustrates the scarcity of cosmology in the *haṭhayoga* instructions. Starting with the former, it only once and briefly mentions in the context of a *prāṇāyāma* exercise called ‘churning’ that the practice will enable the yogin to see the entire universe as undifferentiated from himself.<sup>79</sup> Nowhere is the *kuṇḍalinī* mentioned in connection with cosmology, only as a means to the ultimate bliss, overflowing the body with nectar (*amṛta*) and become immortal.

The *Śivasamhitā*, on the contrary, contains much Śaiva tantric inspired cosmology, and even at the beginning chapters, which indicate that the theoretical basis was of central importance to establish before proceeding into the practices themselves outlined further in the text. Here, similar to the latter text but by other means, the yogin sees in himself (*ātmani*) the universal spirit (*ātman*) by renouncing false desires and worldly chains.<sup>80</sup> The *Śivasamhitā* is dedicated to describe the micro-macrocosm to a high degree:

In this body, the mount Meru (i.e., the vertebral column or *suṣumṇā*) is surrounded by seven islands (i.e., presumably the seven *cakras*); there are rivers, seas, mountains, fields; and lords of the fields too. There are in it seers and sages; all the stars and planets as well. There are sacred pilgrimages, shrines; and presiding deities of the shrines. The sun and moon, agents of creation and destruction, also move in it. Ether, air, fire, water and earth are also here.<sup>81</sup>

The following stanzas continuous elaborating on the structure of the macrocosm called *brahmāṇḍa* (lit., “Brahmā’s egg”) on its parallel level of microcosmic embodiment, although, by describing the *nāḍīs* in their function as fluid-vessels.

Let us now move to probably the most central stanza of the *haṭhayogic* sources examined in this study in regard to explore the *kuṇḍalinī* teachings in a cosmological context. Having introduced Kuṇḍalinī as ‘the supreme goddess’ (*paradevatā*),<sup>82</sup> the *Śivasamhitā* explains that “she represents the creative force of the world, and is always engaged in creation.”<sup>83</sup> The *Śivasamhitā*, furthermore, identifies her as the “Goddess of Speech” (*Vāgdevī*).<sup>84</sup> The text reserves the remaining part of its second chapter for instructions on deliverance of *karman*, the effect of action, chaining the

<sup>79</sup> *Khecarīvidyā* 1.64cd-65ab.

<sup>80</sup> *Śivasamhitā* 1.62.

<sup>81</sup> *dehe ‘asminvartate meruḥ saptadvīpasamanvitaḥ / saritaḥ sāgarāḥ śailā kṣetrāṇi kṣetrapālakāḥ // ṛṣayo munayaḥ sarve nakṣatrāṇi grahāstathā / punyatīrthāṇi pīṭhāni vartante pīṭhadevatāḥ // sṛṣṭisamhāarakartārau bhramantau śasibhāskarau / nabho vāyuśca vahniśca jalaṃ pṛthivī tathaiva ca //* (*Śivasamhitā* 2.1-3)

<sup>82</sup> *Śivasamhitā* 2.23b.

<sup>83</sup> *jagatsamṣṛṣṭirūpā sā nirmāṇe satatodyatā /* (*Śivasamhitā* 2.24ab).

<sup>84</sup> *Śivasamhitā* 2.24cd.

*jīva* that dwells within the cosmic body (*brahmāṇḍa*). The *Śivasamhitā* contains these detailed descriptions and specific associations of the *kuṇḍalinī* with the divine energy of macrocosmic manifestation, presumably because it was a mixed product of the Śaiva non-dualistic tradition with the Śrīvidyā cult, and complete absent of anything to associate it with the Nāth tradition.

Scrutinizing the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* for any concrete cosmological teachings, it is difficult to argue for more than hints. The text equates the Lord of Serpents' (Śeṣa a.k.a. Ananta) function of supporting the earth with the *kuṇḍalinī* supporting all yogic practices.<sup>85</sup> Whereas in the *Śāradātilaka nāda*, *bindu*, and *kalā* emerges from the *kuṇḍalinī*, the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* declares that Śiva is in form of these three components.<sup>86</sup> The fact that the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*'s very first chapter deals with *āśanas* (postures) and not cosmological doctrines as the case of the *Śivasamhitā*, illustrates that the physical aspects of classical *haṭhayoga* predominated the theoretical doctrines. Moreover, the absence of *kuṇḍalinī* doctrines within a cosmological framework suggests that the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* was a composition of Śaiva rather than Śākta worshipers.

Cosmology and cosmogony in the *Haṭharatnāvalī* is, however, widely exposed. The first instance encountered is, nevertheless, not sooner than in the final chapter, which provides an introduction before entering into details about the *nāḍīs* by informing that the following stanzas concern "the microcosmic (*piṇḍa*) and the macrocosmic nature (*brahmāṇḍa*) along with the technique of its worship."<sup>87</sup> Having exposed the *nāḍīs*, the text then declares that doctrines on the micro-macrocosm should be learned from the Vedic texts, Āgamas and Purāṇas, and so forth in order to attain liberation (*mokṣa*).<sup>88</sup> The remaining part of the chapter continues meticulously delineating the 36 elementary properties (*tattvas*) that comprise the Kashmir Śaiva doctrine on cosmology. Again, there is nowhere in the *Haṭharatnāvalī* that the term *kuṇḍalinī* directly is affiliated with cosmogony. Although the text contains numerous stanzas on cosmology, these are to be found in the final chapter that completely abstain to mention the *kuṇḍalinī*, while the *haṭhayogic* practices including the serpentine energy were introduced in beginning chapters.

The *Gheraṇḍasamhitā*, another important *haṭhayogic* text, is, on the contrary, entirely deserted of concrete allusions to cosmology. Merely at a single place where teaching to wake and raise the sleeping serpentine goddess by repetition of the seed syllable *HUM* and the word *haṃsa* (lit., "swan")<sup>89</sup> does it bespeak the union of Śiva and *śakti* in this world, upon which the yogin realizes himself to be *Brahmā*.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>85</sup> *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 3.1.

<sup>86</sup> *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 4.1.

<sup>87</sup> *brahmāṇḍapiṇḍāṇḍayoḥ sāṅgopāsanayoḥ piṇḍāṇḍasvarūpaṃ diṇmātraṃ pradarśyate ||* (*Haṭharatnāvalī* 4.31).

<sup>88</sup> *Haṭharatnāvalī* 4.41.

<sup>89</sup> The symbol of the swan or migratory bird, *haṃsa*, has been attributed various connotations. In Vedic times the *haṃsa* appeared for both the supreme entity (*brahman*) and the individual soul (*ātman*). Since the *Kāṭhaka Upaniṣad* *haṃsa* was identified with the yogic breath. Later Kṣemarāja

We have thus in this part examined the pan-Hindu worldview, which asserts that life in the human world, the microcosm, is a mirror or reflection of life in a greater divine dimension, the macrocosm. This early Vedic principle was elaborated extensively in the Tantras, which, nevertheless, perceived the emanation process as merely a partial element of the complete cyclic evolution of the universe in that they were dealing with the inexorably reverse movement through the stages of cosmic reabsorption of the *praṇava* sound-energy, a phenomenon which was asserted to influence the movement of *kuṇḍalinī* accordingly.

The *haṭhayoga* material studied here at large leaves us with an ambiguous impression of cosmology. Despite from a single place in the *Śivasamhitā*, there is scarcely anything concrete in *haṭhayoga* that connects cosmogony with the *kuṇḍalinī* energy. In terms of the chronological measurements of the textual evidences surveyed here, it cannot reasonably be argued that cosmological doctrines were completely absent in the *haṭhayoga* manuals, but they became less significant during the course of time of the formation and development of classical *haṭhayoga*.

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declared that *haṁsa* in representation of breath energy was none but *kuṇḍalinī* herself (Padoux, *Vāc*, 141), and the Nāths in similar manner identified *haṁsa* with *suṣumṇā* (White, *Alchemical Body*, 218).

<sup>90</sup> *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* 3.41.

## PART II

# The Subtle Physiology

From at least the end of the first millennium AD, yogic and tantric traditions in India began to evolve the idea of an alternative anatomy, which mapped the subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*) as a locus of spiritual energies and points of graduated awakening – *cakras* or *padmas* (lotuses) – arranged along a vertical axis (*suṣumṇā*) through a network of channels (*nāḍīs*). This section examines, in particular, the development of the characteristic notions of these terms of the subtle physiology.

### 1. The *nāḍīs*

Thought issues concerning the subtlety of a human body had presumably been present in India from at least the fourth and fifth century BC, and had developed in early yogic and ascetic circles which were active by this time. Early rudimentary forms of the subtle physiology can be found in Vedic and Vedāntic literature. References to *nāḍīs* can thus be found in both the *Chāndogya* and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, which both, however, restrict the *nāḍīs* to the gross body. The latter of these texts explains (4.3.20) that the *nāḍīs* “are minute as a hair split a thousand times and are filled with humors which are white, blue, yellow, green and red.”<sup>91</sup> However, the *nāḍīs* developed drastically and continually already immediately after these earliest notions up until the most recent texts teaching *haṭhayoga*, in which it is commonly contended that there are 72.000 *nāḍīs*, of which three, viz. the left (*iḍā*), right (*piṅgalā*), middle (*suṣumṇā*), are considered to be most important.<sup>92</sup> The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, one of the earliest Upaniṣads which plausibly is from the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, includes a passage (1.6) suggestive of ideas regarding an internal anatomy contained with a central channel through the subtle body and the possibility of movement in different directions from that central channel. Similar ideas can be found in other early texts of the Upaniṣadic corpus.<sup>93</sup>

Since the time of the Upaniṣads, the seat of the soul has been located in the heart, from where *ātman* is suspended in the midst of a void that extends outwards for ten finger breadths from the core of the subtle body. Another conceptual void that is first described in the Upaniṣads and subsequently continues down into the Tantras is that

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<sup>91</sup> In Swāmi Kuvalayānanda and S.A. Shukla, eds., *Gorakṣaśatakam (With Introduction, Text, English Translation, Notes etc.)* (Lonavla, India: Kaivalyadhama, 2006), 69-70.

<sup>92</sup> Kuvalayānanda and Shukla, *Gorakṣaśatakam*, 72.

<sup>93</sup> Samuel and Johnston, *Religion and the Subtle Body*, 33-34.

of the central channel of the subtle breath.<sup>94</sup> A verse in the *Chāndogya* (8.6.6), which is repeated in the *Kāṭhaka Upaniṣad*, teaches that: “A hundred and one are the arteries of the heart, one of them leads up to the crown of the head. Going upward through that, one becomes immortal.”<sup>95</sup> It is this channel, but more especially the upper endpoint of its trajectory, the Nāṭhs and a number of tantric schools identify with the “ether” or “void.” The later *Maitrī* (6.21) specifies that the name of this main artery is *suṣumṇā* and that the goal of yoga is to cause the *prāṇa* to rise through that channel to the crown.<sup>96</sup> The *Maitrī* was presumably composed at a time when yoga became systematized and even got included some tantric elements.<sup>97</sup> In relation to the sonic manifestation during the *kuṇḍalinī*’s ascent, some of the *Maitrī*’s descriptions are strikingly similar to the tantric doctrines of the arising of the phonemes and the stages of the word (*vāc*). Taking up an image or a myth from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (4.2), the *Maitrī* thus says that Indra dwells in the right eye, his consort Virāj in the left, and that both joining within an artery located in the heart arise therefrom.<sup>98</sup>

In hymns 9 and 10 of the *Ṛg Veda*’s eighth book the word *virāj* appears synonymously for the cosmic cow, identical with *vāc*, whose calf is Indra. Moreover, she appears as an active principle, ruling, luminous, nourishing, and feminine, as a creative energy. Padoux suggests these aspects and roles prefigure the *śakti* of the later periods, although only other words such as *śacī* and the Gnās than *śakti* is explicitly known in the *Ṛg Veda* as the female creative energy.<sup>99</sup> In a somewhat different, although closely related, perspective the Brāhmaṇas identifies *vāc* with Sarasvatī, who will eventually become the goddess of eloquence and learning. In the *Ṛg Veda* she is known first of all as the river of that name.<sup>100</sup> Sarasvatī’s appearances of being once word, motherly, and creative power signifies much of the qualities that are ascribed to the *śakti* energy in the Tantras. Likewise the Nāṭhs and the haṭhayogic texts identify her with *suṣumṇā*. Notably, the *suṣumṇā* was in fact represented in the *Guhyasūtra* (presumably before the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century) as a white, lotus stalk-shaped, cosmological goddess emerging from Śiva’s body, upon whom the practitioner should meditate.<sup>101</sup> Later the *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* ascribed similar qualities as Sarasvatī’s to *kuṇḍalinī*:

<sup>94</sup> White, *Alchemical Body*, 241.

<sup>95</sup> In Thomas McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002), 543.

<sup>96</sup> McEvilley, *Ancient Thought*, 543.

<sup>97</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 26.

<sup>98</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 28.

<sup>99</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 9-10.

<sup>100</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 13.

<sup>101</sup> Shaman Hatley, “Śakti in Early Tantric Śaivism: Historical Observations on Goddess, Cosmology and Ritual in the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*,” in *Goddess Traditions in Tantric Hinduism: History, Practice and Doctrine*, ed. Bjarne Wernicke Olesen (New York: Routledge, 2016), 16, 19 and n. 21.

Kulakuṇḍalī...produces melodious poetry and *bandha* and all other compositions in prose or verse in sequence or otherwise in Saṃskṛta, Prākṛta and other languages. It is she who maintains all the beings of the world by means of inspiration and expiration.<sup>102</sup>

In this fairly late (16<sup>th</sup> century) *layayoga*-passage<sup>103</sup> we witness an increased amount of elaborate qualities that are ascribed to the *kuṇḍalinī*, who is described in her appearance of the goddess Devī Kuṇḍalinī. The commentary, moreover, credits her for placing individual beings (*jīvas*, *jīvātmans*) in their respective bodies, and even being creation itself (*srṣṭi-rūpā*) consisting of emission, maintenance, and reabsorption (*srṣṭi-sthiti-layātmakā*).<sup>104</sup> Finally, the *Haṭharatnāvalī* addresses the *kuṇḍalinī* by the Sarasvatī epithet when describing a *prāṇāyāma* exercise for removing diseases.<sup>105</sup>

## 2. The system of the *cakras*

By the time of Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* (c. 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD), there are indications of a localization of yogic processes in various parts of the body that may foreshadow the later *cakras* of Tantrism and *haṭhayoga*. In the following pages we will examine the system of the *cakras* with particular focus on the relation by which it stands to the *kuṇḍalinī*.

### *Origin and etymology of the term cakra*

The term *cakra* literally means “circle” and has at least a double reference, since the *cakra* were also the circles in which tantric practitioners met to perform worship (*cakrapūjā*, *gaṇacakra*). These external *cakras* took place at the major Śākta pilgrimage sites (*pīṭhas*), which were found throughout the Indian subcontinent. Following the standard logic within India thought of internalization, the main *cakras* within the body were associated with these external *cakras*.<sup>106</sup>

White's study on the historical emergence of the subtle body and its structure in a variety of Hindu and Buddhist texts dating from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries shows, contrary to the impression created by Woodroffe's widely read work, *The Serpent Power*, that the system of the *cakras* presented by Woodroffe as if normative is actually the result of a complex historical evolution expressing but one of many possible configurations.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps due to the power of the illustrations of this configuration in Woodroffe's work, many scholars have taken it to be an immutable

<sup>102</sup> *kūjantī kulakuṇḍalī ... / vācāṃ komalakāvya-bandharacanā bhedātibheda-kramaiḥ / śvāsocchvāsa-vibhañjanena jagatām jīvo yayā dhāryate / sā mūlāmbuja gahvare vilasati proddāma-dīptāvaliḥ* // (*Śaṭcakraṇirūpaṇa* v. 11).

<sup>103</sup> On *layayoga*, see below, Part III, sec. 3, 49-51.

<sup>104</sup> *Śaṭcakraṇirūpaṇa*, and comm. vv. 10-11, pp. 346-49.

<sup>105</sup> *Haṭharatnāvalī* 2.122.

<sup>106</sup> Samuel and Johnston, *Religion and the Subtle Body*, 39.

<sup>107</sup> White, “Early Hindu Tantra,” 144-50.

eternal system as old as yoga itself grounded, perhaps, in the yogin's actual experience of the subtle body. In the earliest discussions of the *cakras* we find reference to only four. Some early sources speak of five. Nor are they necessarily called *cakras*. In fact, there is no standard system of the *cakras*: every school had their own *cakra* system, which developed over time. The term *cakra*, according to White, is first applied to them in the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya*, which enumerates seven *cakras* as well as an expanded list of eleven.<sup>108</sup>

### *The system of the Trika school*

The six centers common in the Kubjikā tradition and later Kaulism are not found in the Trika, Siddhānta, nor Krama scriptures, which put forward a variety of systems. For instance, Abhinavagupta mentions six centers: at the navel (*nābhi*), heart (*hṛdaya*), throat (*kaṇṭha*), palate (*tālu*), top of the head (*brahmarandhra*), and finally the cave of Bhairava beyond the crown of the head, the *dvādaśānta* ("end of twelve fingers' breadth"). The *Netra Tantra* also mentions six centers of the body, though with some variations from Abhinavagupta's six, namely, the organ of generation (*ānandendrīya*), the navel, throat, palate, and the eye center (*bhrūmadhya*) a.k.a. the *bindu* point.<sup>109</sup> However, a further two levels are implied and are found in other texts, at the forehead (*lalāṭa*) and, as in Abhinavagupta's list, at the *dvādaśānta*.<sup>110</sup>

The *cakra* at the organ of generation is the root support (*mūlādhāra*), in which the coiled serpent lies dormant. The *cakra* situated at the navel region, from which, according to Abhinavagupta, spring forth the ten chief currents (*nāḍīs*),<sup>111</sup> is important for the distribution and exchange of *prāṇa*. The center of the heart is where *kuṇḍalinī* usually chooses to stir, since in this region occur the mixing of the breaths and their subsequent merging. At the center of the *kaṇṭha*, the raw energy of *kuṇḍalinī* as she rises and enters this part of the body is purified by yogic practice, while the *bhrūmadhya* center requires mastery over the state of *samādhi* in order to be passed. The term *bindu* is used to designate the *bhrūmadhya* because, when this center is pierced, the pent-up energy that has accumulated there is released, and a dot of dazzling light appears. In regard to the *lalāṭa* in the middle of the forehead, this is the realm where *kuṇḍalinī* discovers the entrance of the *dvādaśānta* and her journey comes to an end.

In fact the *dvādaśānta* appears at the same time in three different, yet interrelated, dimensions. First, externally, as an exact spot where the ordinary breath dies away. Secondly, internally, as the *brahmarandhra* located twelve finger's breadth from the *bhrūmadhya*, following the curve of the head. Third, above the skull, twelve fingers' breadth from the *brahmarandhra*, where there is no longer connection to the body,

<sup>108</sup> White, "Early Hindu Tantra," 146.

<sup>109</sup> Gavin D. Flood, *Body and Cosmology in Kashmir Śaivism* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1993), 258.

<sup>110</sup> Flood, *Body and Cosmology*, 258

<sup>111</sup> These ten are *iḍā*, *piṅgalā*, *suṣumṇā*, *gandhārī*, *hastijihvā*, *yaśasvinī*, *pūṣā*, *ālambusā*, *kuhū*, and *śaṅkhinī*.

*dvādaśānta* is known as the cosmic center with thousand spokes (*sahasrāra*), in which the yogin completely fuses and identifies himself with the all-pervading Śiva.<sup>112</sup> It is in the *dvādaśānta* that occur the merging of the individual energy into Śiva's energy and the achievement of liberation; hence only true yogins reach it at the final stage of the induced rising of *kuṇḍalinī*, which corresponds to the final merging of the universe into the energy. It is thus, according to tantric Śaivism, the end of the cosmic process or reabsorption.<sup>113</sup> When applying the theory of three cosmic dimensions to these metaphysical doctrines, there appears a correspondence to the three localities of the *dvādaśānta* in that the first locality of the *dvādaśānta* operates on the microcosmic level, the intermediate place of its second locality on the mesocosmic level, and the third locality in the divine macrocosmic level of innumerable energies, eternally present, in which the yogin attains liberation while still alive (*jīvanmukti*).

According to the tantric non-dual exegetics composed by Kashmirian authors – who present the notion of wheels (*cakras*) much from a cosmological perspective – the arising and subsiding of each wave of cosmic manifestation is marked by a regular sequence (*krama*) of metaphysical events. Following one after another in recurrent cycles, each sequence is aptly symbolized by a rotating wheel (*śakticakra*), the spokes of which are the aspects of the divine creative energy brought into existence as the wheel revolves. The unfolding of the wheel confers upon the yogin the enjoyment (*bhoga*) and bliss (*ānanda*) of cosmic consciousness. When the wheel contracts, the yogin's individuality fuses with pure consciousness and he experiences its unconditioned freedom. In these two movements yogic powers (*siddhis*) are conferred by the particular waves of energy of the universal vibration (*spanda*) of consciousness which is the source of liberation (*mokṣa*).<sup>114</sup>

### ***The system of the Kujjikā cult***

The doctrines of the Kujjikā cult were depended on the Trika's exegetical corpus. It was in fact in the Kujjikā Tantras that the symbolism of goddess Kuṇḍalinī and the stations of her rise and descent were first elaborated in its most commonly known form. These centers are themselves *yonis* of energy in the center of which the goddess of the center, Madhyadevī (= Kuṇḍalinī), resides.<sup>115</sup> In the Kujjikā system Navātma also called Naveśvara or Navaka is worshipped as Kujjikā's spouse. The divine couple, Navātma and Kujjikā, assumes six variant forms to preside over "six orders" (*ṣaḍanvaya*-) located in the six centers (*cakras*) along the central axis of the

<sup>112</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 30-31.

<sup>113</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 145.

<sup>114</sup> Mark S.G. Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration: An Analysis of the Doctrines and Practices of Kashmir Shaivism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), 117-27.

<sup>115</sup> Mark S.G. Dyczkowski, "Kujjikā the Erotic Goddess: Sexual Potency, Transformation and Reversal in the Heterodox Theophanies of the Kujjikā Tantras," *Indologica Taurinensia: Official Organ of the International Association of Sanskrit Studies*, vols. 21-22 (Edizioni A.I.T.: Torino, Italy, 1995-96), 139.



body and equated with the five elements (earth, water, fire, wind and ether) and mind (*manas*). The system of the six energy centers *ādhāra* (lit., “support”) or *mūlādhāra* in the anus, *svādhiṣṭhāna* in the genital region, *maṇipūra* in the navel, *anāhata* in the heart, *viśuddhi* in the throat, and *ājñā* between the eyebrows, plus the “center” beyond the *cakras* at the crown (*sahasrāra*), which became the standard list in late *haṭhayoga* manuals, was presumably established in an 11<sup>th</sup> century Kubjikā text, the *Kubjikāmatatantra*. In fact, as Professor Alexis Sanderson documents, this *cakra* system became so universal and disseminated as a part of *kuṇḍalinī* practice beyond the boundaries of the tantric cults that it has been forgotten in India (and also not noticed outside her) it is quite absent in all the tantric traditions except this and the cult of the goddess Tripurasundarī.<sup>116</sup>

The Kubjikā cult schematically associates their six centers with various cosmological (i.e., sense objects or material elements) and religious (i.e., gods and goddesses) aspects. For instance, the cult perceives each of the six centers to correspond with one of the early Kaula lineages founded by Matsyendranātha.<sup>117</sup> Hence, as the *kuṇḍalinī* rises through the centers the adept progressively acquires the authority of each lineage which governs the corresponding element and constituent of the body (*dhātu*).<sup>118</sup> My intension here, however, is not to account for all of these various aspects but rather to illustrate their appearances in the context of the contact between *kuṇḍalinī* and the centers. For instance, the six centers from *mūlādhāra* to *ājñā* are respectively associated with the five elements (*bhūtas*), earth, water, fire, air, and space, plus a sixth “mental” element, as well as six colors, viz. white, red, black, firebrand, crystal, and light. The Kubjikā texts, however, are scarce of explanations to the connection between the elements, etc. associated with the centers and the yogin’s physical condition.

In order to at least get a general sense of that relation it is necessary to consult the Āgamic literature, which not only continued but also expanded the dual Sāṃkhya philosophy of the *tattvas* (“units of manifest being”) and their relation to the elements, senses, sense objects, etc. constituting man. The Śaivas thus operates with 36 *tattvas* compared to Sāṃkhya’s 25. According to the Śaivas, each element pertains to a particular domain of the body; e.g., the domain of earth is the feet to knees. Each domain has a number of attributes, corresponding to the number of perceptible qualities present in each material element.<sup>119</sup> The Śaivas perceive the emission and reabsorption of the *tattvas* from and into their source-substance (*mahāmāyā*) as a basic cosmological process creating man,<sup>120</sup> wherefore the *Śivasamhitā* in a metaphorical allusion states that: “The ‘Great Goddess of Illusion’

<sup>116</sup> Alexis Sanderson, “Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions,” in *The World’s Religions*, ed. Stewart Sutherland (London: Routledge, 1988), 687.

<sup>117</sup> In fact, Matsyendranātha himself, as White has convincingly contended, was in a curious way subjected to be connected by his name to the lower half of the yogic body, the place of the sleeping *kuṇḍalinī* (White, *Alchemical Body*, 222-29).

<sup>118</sup> Dyczkowski, *Manthānabhairavatantram Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ – Notes*, 4:163 n. 43.

<sup>119</sup> Davis, *Oscillating Universe*, 55.

<sup>120</sup> Davis, *Oscillating Universe*, 44.

(*mahāmāyā*), Kuṇḍalinī, is also absorbed (*vilīyate*) in [mount] Kailāsa, (Lord Śiva’s paradise).<sup>121</sup> This cosmogonic process is directly paralleled in practical methods, which consist of systematic worship of various parts of the body in order to purify the various elements. The method of purification follows the order of reabsorption. Aghoraśiva explains that

In order to purify the subtle body, the worshipper should cause the *tattvas* to be dissolved (*laya*), each into its own source, in an inverse order [to that of their emission] ending with *mahāmāyā*.<sup>122</sup>

His commentator, Nirmalamāṇi, glosses *laya* as “reabsorption” and explains that each *tattva* goes within the source-substance that gave birth to it. Thus, the worshipper visualizes earth reabsorbed into odor, water into taste, fire into form, wind into touch, ether into sound, and the perceptible qualities (*tanmātras*) into the inert aspect of the ego.<sup>123</sup> Although this “subtle body” of the *tattvas*, etc. is not directly related to the “subtle autonomy” of the *cakras*, etc. there are obvious commonalities that serve to better understand the connection between the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels.

### ***The cakras in manifestation: Applications of the subtle sound and phonemes***

According to the Śaiva Tantras the microcosmic movement of *kuṇḍalinī*’s ascent from the *mūlādhāra* through the *nābhi* and *hṛdaya* to the *kaṇṭha*, accordingly occurs on four planes in which manifestation emerges from the subtlest level up to the most dense level of sound vibration. These four planes through which the cosmic sound gradually manifests into the gross world are termed (1) *parā*, (2) *paśyantī*, (3) *madhyamā*, and (4) *vaikharī*, respectively corresponding to the four centers mentioned above.<sup>124</sup> Thus, (1) at the lowest center of the body the *kuṇḍalinī* is sleeping, but (2) when she moves therefrom up to the *nābhi*, the sound level becomes more perceptible without yet being particularized. This means that differentiation, however faintly, then begins to dawn, and that the phonemes are present, not as differentiated and utterable, but in the form of the energies which generate them and are inseparable from the overall phonic energy. When (3) the *kuṇḍalinī* passes beyond the navel region and rises to the center of the heart, the sound of the intermediate level is produced. The sound vibration at this level becomes particularized, for there the distinctive features of the phonemes, and even of speech, appear, though still hardly emerging out of the undivided phonic energy. Continuing

<sup>121</sup> *kuṇḍalyapi mahāmāyā kailāse sā vilīyate* // (*Śivasamhitā* 4.26cd).

<sup>122</sup> In Davis, *Oscillating Universe*, 53.

<sup>123</sup> Davis, *Oscillating Universe*, 53.

<sup>124</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 146.

upward (4), the *kuṇḍalinī* reaches the throat *cakra*, where she mingles with the breath and produces the phonemes, the syllables, and the words of empirical speech.<sup>125</sup>

Commenting on the *Ṣaṭcakraṇirūpaṇa* v. 51, which is wholly dedicated to describe the six centers, Kālīcaraṇa straightforward identifies the four levels – which he calls the four “sound-producing” (*śabdotpādikā*) *śaktis* – with the *kuṇḍalinī*. However, associating the levels from *parā* to *vaikharī* respectively with the *bindu*-point located above the *ājñā*, *ājñā*, *anāhata*, and *mūlādhāra*, Kālīcaraṇa, on the contrary, identifies the four levels from *parā* to *vaikharī* respectively with the *mūlādhāra*, *svādhiṣṭhāna*, *anāhata*, and the mouth (i.e., *sahasrāra*) in his description of the process of dissolution (*laya-krama*).<sup>126</sup> When the emergence of sound is looked at on the microcosmic level (i.e., that of yoga) with the awakening and ascent of the *kuṇḍalinī*, *nāda* can be a somewhat perceptible sound.

Those sounds that must be perceived by the yogin, who performs certain exercises designed to raise the *kuṇḍalinī*, are variously described in a number of texts teaching *haṭhayoga*. In the yoga scriptures as well as in various Tantras the *cakras* are represented with phonemes written on the petals of letters forming the lotuses (*cakras*). The petals are distributed among the six centers from bottom up as follows: four, six, ten, twelve, sixteen, and two. The fifty phonemes are dispersed among the petals, so for instance the *mūlādhāra* usually has the letters *sa*, *ṣa*, *śa*, and *va* connected to it, while the *ājñācakra* only has the letters *ha* and *kṣa* connected to it.<sup>127</sup> There is a link between the phonemes and the centers that will account for a particular *bījamantra* affecting a particular center, thus being instrumental in bringing about the ascent of the *kuṇḍalinī*.

Testimonies of the necessity to chant the *bījamantras* in order to raise the *kuṇḍalinī* are found, particularly, in the later Yoga-Upaniṣads such as the *Dhyānabindu* or the *Nāḍabindu*, where *nāda* is considered important in the meditation of *om*.<sup>128</sup> When the fifty different syllables or phonic seeds (*bījas*) of the Sanskrit alphabet dispersed on the various *cakras* are struck by the energy of the vital breath as the *kuṇḍalinī* rises, the subtle sound (*nāda*) of the universe appears as gross phonic vibrations emerging from each of the phonic seeds.<sup>129</sup> In the course of the gradual reabsorption of the *bījamantra* sound-vibration, the resonance (*nāda*) merges from *bindu* into the *kuṇḍalinī* energy, which is its source and, therefore, still endowed with a certain form of sonic vibration. This is a spontaneous creative movement of this energy. According to some interpretations, the coiled *kuṇḍalinī* forms as many rings around the *bindu* as there are phonemes, while other texts

<sup>125</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 141-43.

<sup>126</sup> *Ṣaṭcakraṇirūpaṇa*, comm. v. 11, pp. 348-49.

<sup>127</sup> See, for instance, the entire the *Ṣaṭcakraṇirūpaṇa*.

<sup>128</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 97 n. 30.

<sup>129</sup> The mass or totality of these fifty sounds (*śabdarāśī*) is, according to Kṣemarāja, the sound of *haṃsoccāra*. In this context, Kṣemarāja tells us, is *uccāra* in essence the expansion (*sphāra*) experienced by the supreme energy (Padoux, *Vāc*, 142 n. 158).

describe them as placed on the petals of the *cakras* or on the triangle enclosing the *bindu*.<sup>130</sup>

Now, the *bindu* on the top of the triangular (*yoni*) is associated with the *bīja* syllable *AIM*, the syllable of emanation (*śṛṣṭi-bīja*), as well as with the *mūlādhāra*.<sup>131</sup> The triangular *AIM* located in the *mūlādhāra* is a replica of a triangle in the *sahasrāra* located above the head, the spot which in Trika terminology is identified as the *brahmarandhra* or the inner *dvādaśānta*.<sup>132</sup> The locations of the triangles are both the “Cavity of Brahṁā” (*brahmarandhra*), because they are equally openings at the extremities of the *suṣumṇā*. *Kuṇḍalinī* issues out of both triangles: the one below moves up through the centers, while the one above moves down through them. The hexagon of the two triangles – where one is facing down and the other up – illustrates the union of these two known as the “conjunction of the thunderbolt” (*vajrasandhi*) that generates the awakening of the *kuṇḍalinī*. The six centers (*ṣaṭcakra*) in the body are commonly projected into the corners of the hexagon, where they are associated with the person who resides in them.

The Kujikās perceive that the aroused *kuṇḍalinī* pierces rotating in an counterclockwise sequence (*krama*) the six centers on the hexagon, where each center that she passes accordingly is worshipped by the recitation of *mantras*. The clockwise sequential direction is accordingly identified with the *kuṇḍalinī*’s descent.<sup>133</sup> In a macro-microcosmic perspective, this *mantra* ritual thus implies the following notions: Emerging into the summit of the centers, the *kuṇḍalinī* descends within the adept; this is a process which corresponds to cosmic emission. On the contrary, when she emits from the centers, she ascends within the adept, which corresponds to cosmic reabsorption.<sup>134</sup> These two groups of antinomian characteristics, corresponding thus respectively to the purifying descent and ascent of the *kuṇḍalinī*’s movement through the *suṣumṇā*, are reflected in the structure of *mantra* recitation.<sup>135</sup>

In recapping Part II, we may conclude that some of the subtle body descriptions are ultimately grounded in a body of metaphysical assumptions that date back, in some cases, to the time of the classical Upaniṣads. However, it was the Tantras that heavily elaborated on the system of the subtle physiology, combining it particularly with aspects of the cosmic manifestation through sound. All of the categories and functions ascribed to the subtle physiology thus became subject to multiplication, variation, and homologization as generic themes in the various cult-religious

<sup>130</sup> The synthesis of the *bindu*- and *kuṇḍalinī*-oriented paradigms of yoga had its first truly systematic manifestation in the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* (James Mallinson, “Haṭha Yoga,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol. 3, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 779-80.

<sup>131</sup> Dyczkowski, *Manthānabhairavatantram Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ – Notes*, 1:152 n. 140.

<sup>132</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 34.

<sup>133</sup> Dyczkowski, *Manthānabhairavatantram Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ – Notes*, 1:150-51 nn. 129-32.

<sup>134</sup> Dyczkowski, *Manthānabhairavatantram Kumārikākhaṇḍaḥ – Notes*, 1:163 n. 161.

<sup>135</sup> The hexagonal diagram is further explained under the name *kāmakaḷā* (see below, Part III, sec. 1, 42-45, and fig. 2, p. 43).

discourses. In the tantric view the *cakras* arranged along the vertical axis in the human body are implicated in the process of self-realization and the expansion of consciousness, which are carried out by the explicated *kuṇḍalinī* practices and rituals that we will examine in the following part.

## PART III

# The *Kuṇḍalinī* Rituals and Practices

### 1. The sexual rituals

A key element to the subtle body practices in the earliest descriptions in yogic sources is their close connection with sexual rituals. For example, the later chapters of the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya*, teaching worship of one's maiden as the internal *śakti*, present practices of the sequence of *cakras* along the spinal column and the importance of the raising of the goddess (i.e., *kuṇḍalinī*) from the lowest *cakra* up through the *cakras*, which are closely associated with sexual yoga.

What could reasonably be called “sexual practices” were, in a generic sense, already present in the Vedic and Upaniṣadic material. Late Vedic texts treat sexual intercourse as symbolically equivalent to the Vedic sacrifice, and ejaculation of semen as the offering.<sup>136</sup> New emerging cults appropriated the *kāpālīka*-style ascetism and their sexual practices into more aestheticized sexual rites. Sexual intercourse, real or imagined, became used in tantric rites as a way to stimulate the flow of substances along and within the body. This process is associated in various ways with meditative techniques for the attainment of health and liberating insight. With reference to the broader tantric tradition, White elaborates on the embodiment of sexuality in practice:

Here, all humans were viewed as essentially androgynous with sexual intercourse an affair between a female serpentine nexus of energy, generally called *kuṇḍalinī*, and a male principle, identified with Śiva, both of which were located in the subtle body.<sup>137</sup>

However, something else was seen in the Nāths' emphasis on the practices giving rejuvenation and immortality. Gorakṣanātha describes that *kuṇḍalinī* is divine energy (*śakti*) and female materiality (*prakṛti*), but she is also a tigress (an animal with which also the vulva is identified), who can drain a man of all his energy and seed.<sup>138</sup> Like the vulva, the *kuṇḍalinī* both alarms danger and the promise of great power and pleasure for the practitioner. In this sense, the yogic sources speak of the internal female serpentine by the name “*bhogavatī*,” a term which once refers to her coiled form (*bhoga*, from *bhuj*, “bend, curve”) and her enjoyment (*bhoga*, from *bhuj*,

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<sup>136</sup> Geoffrey Samuel, *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century* (N.Y., USA: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 282.

<sup>137</sup> White, *Alchemical Body*, 5.

<sup>138</sup> White, *Alchemical Body*, 218-19 n. 7.

“enjoy, possess”). In fact, *kuṇḍalinī*’s role as *bhogavatī* is twofold: she both *takes* pleasure and *gives* pleasure.<sup>139</sup>

The new sexual rites of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries are different, since here rather than sexual intercourse being homologized with the sacrifice the process of sexual excitation is homologized with the movement of internal substances or energies within the body. On a more concrete level, this means that the rise of the *kuṇḍalinī* brings about the transmutation of raw semen into nectar in the cranial vault.<sup>140</sup> Hence the channeling of *prāṇa* in the *suṣumṇā* should in this connection be understood very clearly as the internalization of orgasmic ejaculation.

### ***Sexual union: Rituals of the Trika school***

The most familiar imaginary applied in the Trika school is that of the arousal of the serpentine goddess, Kuṇḍalinī, who is conceived of as dwelling in the lowest of the *cakras* (*mūlādhāra* or *mūlābhūmi*) within the human body. Here, the perception of *kuṇḍalinī* is that she, as receptacle energy (*ādhāraśakti*), holds within her a poison (*viṣa*), which destroys the vitality of human beings as they dissipate their energies in sexual agitation. Theoretically, if the apex of the triangle (*trikoṇa*) symbolizing the root *cakra* is turned downward, the spiritual force will be dissipated to the benefit of sexual life, since breath and semen follow a downward course. On the other hand, if the yogin overturns the triangle, its apex will thereafter be directed upward and the opening called *meḍhrakanda* (lit., “bulb of the membrum virile”) at the base of the sexual organ lets in the virile potency, which then enters the *suṣumṇā*. Having succeeded his effort to reverse the downward flow of semen, the yogin at the time of the *kuṇḍalinī*’s arousing transforms poison into an all-pervading (*viś*)<sup>141</sup> power, which, in turn, generates access to an elevated state of consciousness.<sup>142</sup> Silburn writes:

If, when *kuṇḍalinī* becomes erect and the energies are purified, pleasure is used as a stepping stone, it converts into the bliss of pure consciousness. So, the sexual rite through which access to cosmic consciousness is to be gained rests upon the specifics of sexual union.<sup>143</sup>

In the natural contact between subject and object, the yogin keeps joy in the background. Seeing his body being transfigurely merged into the universe, the yogin thus finds the opportunity to merge into the greater joy of cosmic consciousness through the unification of the two gender poles. Quoting the *Yogasamcara*,

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<sup>139</sup> White, *Alchemical Body*, 219.

<sup>140</sup> White, *Alchemical Body*, 218.

<sup>141</sup> Abhinavagupta in his *magnum opus*, the *Tantrāloka*, plays on the word *viś[a]*: when she sleeps, the *kuṇḍalinīśakti* holds the poison that destroys human vitality; when she awakens, this poison transforms itself into all-pervading (*viś*) power (*Tantrāloka* 3.170-72a, p. 108).

<sup>142</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 27.

<sup>143</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 138.

Abhinavagupta writes in the *Tantrāloka* that as in mutual intercourse, the *yoni* and *liṅga* emit nectar (*amṛta*), in the same way, the mutual intercourse of fire (*agni*) and moon (*soma*) releases nectar.<sup>144</sup> The fact that *kuṇḍalinī* prefigures in the intense heat of *agni*, the brilliance of sun and the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*), becomes obvious in the *Tantrāloka* adding that

When the supreme subject, or fire, sets the object ablaze, the moon, the latter releases the flow it contains and engenders the world common to all humans, as well as the varied world specific to each individual. Then this energy, all ablaze, pours its supreme nectar on all sides, right into the wheel (*cakra*) of the subject, through the wheel of the object and that of knowledge; and this nectar trickling from wheel to wheel finally reaches the fivefold wheel.<sup>145</sup>

That is, the supreme subject discovers within himself the *cakra* through the sexual union, when heart, throat, and lips take part in the unfoldment of the whole being. When both lovers remain aware of the process going on in the median way as pure interiority, it is *kuṇḍalinī* that rises inside the median way through the wheels up to the *dvādaśānta*.<sup>146</sup> Presumably the practitioner applying these outward-directed activities, which Abhinavagupta reluctantly revealed, claiming them to be “[too] secret,”<sup>147</sup> attain a state of harmony – i.e., equality of subject and object – through *kuṇḍalinī* alone and not without her. Despite the highly evocative sexual language, Abhinavagupta’s model is one of phonematic rather than fluid expansion and contraction. It is in the later Tantras and haṭhayogic classics that the *kuṇḍalinī* becomes the vehicle for fluid, rather than phonematic, transactions and transfers.

### ***Sexual fluids: Rituals of Kaulism***

In contrast to the Trika system in which the *kuṇḍalinī* is the dynamic manifestation of Śiva in the universal macrocosm as well as the human microcosm, the Kaula tradition perceive the *kuṇḍalinī* in the body of the yogin to be an incarnation of the feminine, and thereby incarnates all the perils and joys that women can represent for men. Here, the *siddhis* and *jīvanmukti* are the direct results of the internal combination and transformation of sexual fluids (*dravyas*) into the divine nectar of immortality, the *amṛta*.

Kaula rituals emphasize the manifesting aspects of sexual fluid rather than the acoustic and graphic ones. According to the Kaulas, it is via a sexually transmitted stream or flow of sexual fluids that the practitioner taps into the source of that

<sup>144</sup> Paraphrasing *Tantrāloka* 4.131.

<sup>145</sup> *tatrasthām muñcate dharām somo hyagni pradīpitaḥ / sṛjati tatham jagatsarvam ātmanyātmanyānantakam || śoḍaśadvādaśārābhyāmaṣṭāreṣvatha sarvaśaḥ / evaṁ krameṇa sarvatra cakreṣvāmṛtamuttamam || somaḥ sravati yāvacca pañcānām cakrapaddhatiḥ /* (*Tantrāloka* 4.134-136a; tr. Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 145).

<sup>146</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 152.

<sup>147</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 149.



stream, (the male) Śiva, represented by the phallic image of the *liṅga*. His self-manifestation is effected through the goddess, whose own sexual fluid carries his divine germ plasm through the lineages or transmissions of the tantric clan family (*kula*), which even identifies human females called yoginīs with the goddess herself.<sup>148</sup>

The yoginīs are presumably prototypes of the *kuṇḍalinī*, who was considered by the early Kaula tradition to be a goddess flying upward when satisfied by the oblations of wine and vital fluids offered into her mouth. The yoginī's flight was fueled by her extraction of the essence of the five nectars (human semen, blood, urine, excrement, and marrow) or five elements (earth, water, air, fire, ether) of the human body.<sup>149</sup> This is precisely the role played by the *kuṇḍalinī* in the subtle body of haṭhayogic exertion. As she rises or flies upward along the *suṣumṇā*, she implodes earth into water at the level of the *svādhiṣṭhāna*, water into fire at the *maṇipūra*, fire into air at the *anāhata*, and air into the ether, through which she flies at the *viśuddhi*.<sup>150</sup> The female yoginī was vital to aspiring male practitioners, who wished to be inseminated with the liberating clan fluid. Absorption of the clan fluid was effectuated through the drinking of such emissions as described or through the practice of the *vajrolī mudrā*, in which the male partner extracted his own essence back from the yoginī through urethral suction.<sup>151</sup>

The latter practice found its way into the classical *haṭhayoga* teachings and is described in the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 3.5-8 as one of ten *mudrās* that assist the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening. In the case of the *haṭhayoga* techniques, both when sex is directly involved – as in the case of the *vajrolī mudrā* – and when it is not, they are structured around the way in which the material nature of the body, both subtle and gross, is linked to inner alchemy and the transubstantiation and flow of sexual fluid. In modern usage, however, the *haṭhayoga* practices have generally been divested of the tantric and sexual associations – a process that already can be seen in the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* – although these are still present in various Indian ascetic traditions.<sup>152</sup> It therefore seems that we have in the classic *haṭhayoga*-style involving the “flying up” of *kuṇḍalinī* through the six centers to unite with Śiva in the cranial vault, when viewed historically, an internalization of what was originally a system of ritual transaction of actual sexual fluids.

### ***The pañcamakāra ritual***

Rather than sexual contact, the rituals should invoke an intimate union or even sexual intercourse (*maithuna*). The term *maithuna* refers to the last, culminating step in a ritual practice that involves the application of five ingredients known as the

<sup>148</sup> David Gordon White, “Transformations in the Art of Love: *Kāmakalā* Practice in Hindu Tantric and Kaula Traditions,” *History of Religion* 38(2) (1998): 175.

<sup>149</sup> White, “Early Hindu Tantra,” 154.

<sup>150</sup> White, “Early Hindu Tantra,” 155.

<sup>151</sup> White, “Art of Love,” 195.

<sup>152</sup> Samuel and Johnston, *Religion and the Subtle Body*, 44.

*pañcamakāra* (lit., “the five M-words”): 1. wine (*madya*), 2. fish (*matsya*), 3. meat (*māṃsa*), 4. parched grain (*mudrā*), and 5. *maithuna*. In this portion of the tantric sexual rituals that involves these five anti-sacraments, the *kuṇḍalinī* plays a pivotal role in the dynamic transfer of subtle body fluids. Agehānanda Bhāratī (1923-1991) describes the process thusly:

When the practitioner is poised to drink the liquor (*madya*), he says “I sacrifice;” and as he does so, he mentally draws the coiled energy of the clan (*kula-kuṇḍalinī*) from her seat in the base *cakra*. This time, however, he does not draw her up into the thousand-petaled *sahasrāra* in the cranial vault, but instead he brings her to the tip of his tongue and seats her there, at this moment he drinks the beverage from its bowl, and as he drinks she impresses the thought on his mind that it is not he himself who is drinking but the *kula-kuṇḍalinī* now seated on the tip of his tongue, to whom he is offering the liquid as a libation, in the same manner he now empties all the other bowls [containing food offerings, including sexual fluids] as he visualizes that he feeds their contents as oblations to the goddess – for the *kula-kuṇḍalinī* is the microcosmic aspect of the universal Śakti.<sup>153</sup>

Rather than in her role of setting into vibration the phonemes of the subtle lotus-petals, the rising *kuṇḍalinī* is here the consummator of impure substances, the substitutes for or actual instantiations of vital bodily fluids which the practitioner sacrifices to her as oblation for the sake of a higher purpose, namely, access into the universal Śakti.

The aim of the sexual ritual should be perceived as serving a twofold purpose: On the one hand, the practitioner strives towards liberation (*mokṣa*, *mukti*) from conditional existence, on the other hand, however, he also seeks to realize the enjoyment (*bhoga*, *bhukti*) mirroring the pleasure that Śiva takes in his female aspect, the goddess identified with the *kuṇḍalinī*. It is a pleasure of the same order as that enjoyed by Śiva in his union with the goddess that the practitioner comes to know in awakening and raising his *kuṇḍalinī*. The practitioner’s *bhoga* takes the form of pleasure he enjoys by consuming the *makāras*, which precede sexual intercourse with his partner. The wine that he drinks and the flesh and fish he eats become offerings into the mouth of the *kuṇḍalinī*, who rises therewith. Riding the *kuṇḍalinī* upwards on a wave of enjoyment, the practitioner thus eventually comes to experience both pleasure and liberation at the same time.<sup>154</sup>

### ***The kāmakalā diagram***

Another tantric sexual practice which is important to mention in the context of *kuṇḍalinī* awakening is the transformative ritual of the *kāmakalā* (“divine principle of desire” or “art of love”) diagram (fig. 2; see next page), which appears in a number of tantric sects, especially in the late Trika and Śrīvidyā traditions. The ritual or practical component of the *kāmakalā* is abstracted into a program of meditation,

<sup>153</sup> Quoted in White, “Early Hindu Tantra,” 153.

<sup>154</sup> White, *Alchemical Body*, 220.

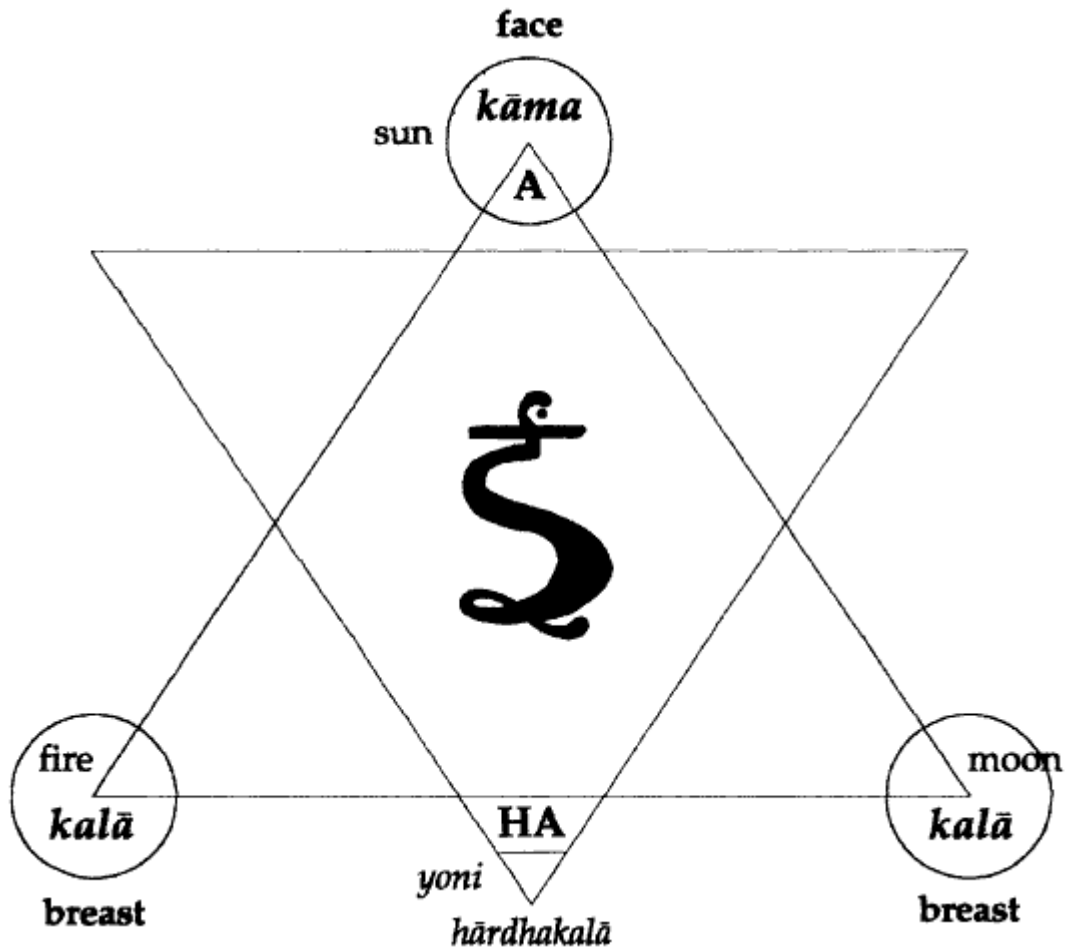


Figure 2 – Kāmakalā according to the *Yoginīhṛdaya* 2.21<sup>155</sup>

which aims towards a non-discursive realization of the enlightened non-dual consciousness. Through the meditative practice of *mantras* and *maṇḍalas* or *yantras* – i.e., respectively the acoustic and the graphic or visual representations of the manifestation of the goddess – the consciousness of the practitioner is uplifted. The basic, ideological principles of this practice, as White argues, are probably borrowed from earlier traditions.<sup>156</sup>

In the *kāmakalā*'s graphic representation of the divine emanation within the human microcosm it is the image of a drop or point (*bindu*) that appears as that form which encapsulates the being, energy and pure consciousness of the divine. As described for instance in the *Yoginīhṛdaya* 2.21, a script pertaining to the Śrīvidyā corpus, the yantric representation of *kāmakalā* appears as a hexagon formed by two intersecting triangles, of which the upturned and downturned respectively symbolize

<sup>155</sup> This diagram is borrowed from White, "Art of Love," 179.

<sup>156</sup> White, "Art of Love," 175.

Śiva and his consort Śakti.<sup>157</sup> At the apex of the upturned Śiva triangle we find the Sanskrit vocal *a*, which is both the sun and face of the maiden supporting the meditation. This is also termed the “medial *bindu*” point, which contrasts the two *bindu* points that form the *visarga* in the base angles of the triangle. They represent fire and moon, and are also identified with the maiden’s two breasts. Located between these two and pointing downward is the apex of the downward Śakti triangle, which is the *yonī* of the maiden and the locus of the consonant *ha*.<sup>158</sup>

The Sanskrit vocal *ī* located in the heart of the hexagon represents the *kuṇḍalinī*, which together with the *bindu* becomes the *ĪM*, the special seed syllable *mantra* of the Śrīvidyā goddess, Tripurasundarī. It is in the *ĪM*-syllable’s particular shape that energy, in the coiled form of the *kuṇḍalinī* serpent, dwells between the *bindu* and the *visarga*, which respectively symbolizes the male and female principles. The fact that these respectively represent the first and last letters of the Sanskrit alphabet (*a* and *ha*) means that the rising of the coiled *kuṇḍalinī* serpent sets in motion the complete unified resonance of the entire sonic spectrum. Similar to the rising of the coiled serpentine *kuṇḍalinī*, the grapheme *ĪM* represents a yogic process that extends from the base to the apex of the subtle body. The bipolarities depicted in the *kāmakaḷā* diagram are mediated by the *kuṇḍalinī*, who in her yogic rise from the base to the apex of the system is telescoping the lower phonemes and graphemes of the Sanskrit alphabet into their higher evolutes until all are absorbed in the *bindu*, at which all manifest sound and image dissolve in the cranial vault.<sup>159</sup>

Mark Dyczkowski has identified Tripurasundarī’s seed syllable to be *AIM*, which is likewise (and probably borrowed from) the seed syllable of the goddess Kubjikā.<sup>160</sup> This makes perfectly sense in the light of the fact that Kubjikā is the epithet for Kuṇḍalinī (or vice versa). In fact, as Dyczkowski notices, “all major Kaula goddesses are identified with Kuṇḍalinī,” although Kubjikā, he adds, stands out in that “she is not Kuṇḍalinī merely by ascription: much of her mythology, iconography and ritual is molded primarily around her personage, metaphysical identity and activity as Kuṇḍalinī.”<sup>161</sup> In regard to Kubjikā and her arousal illustrated in sexual pairing of the gender opposites, Dyczkowski documents that Kubjikā is in particular (or perhaps only) iconographic depicted in her *maṇḍalas* with their *yonis*, *liṅgas* and installed seed *mantras* symbolizing the blissful, cosmic consciousness obtained through hierogamic union. In this connection Dyczkowski explains that when goddess Kubjikā as Kuṇḍalinī rises within the yogin, “she rises within herself and the hierogamy that results at the climax of her flow is completely

<sup>157</sup> *Yoginīhrdaya* 2.21.

<sup>158</sup> Śiva is symbolized in the mystic alphabet by the first letter – *a* – which stands for the absolute, while his *śakti* is represented by *ha*, the last letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, symbolizing the ongoing emanation of the universe. Each letter of the alphabet thus stands for a mesocosmic aspect of the universe’s phase of maintenance in the cycle of cosmic emission and withdrawal.

<sup>159</sup> White, “Art of Love,” 180.

<sup>160</sup> Mark S.G. Dyczkowski, *A Journey in the World of the Tantras* (Varanasi, India: Indica Books, 2004), 267.

<sup>161</sup> Dyczkowski, *World of the Tantras*, 264 n. 126.

internalized.”<sup>162</sup> In other words, she is activated by the conjunction (*yoga*) of *yonī* and *liṅga*, which stimulates her flow out of the matrix of energy constituted symbolically by the phonemes of the alphabet. The seed (*retas*) pours out flaming upwards. In the aroused conditioned it is the consuming energy (*śakti*) of desire (*icchā*) burnt by passion (*kāmadagdhā*). At the culminating point, which is marked by the release of seed that flows down to the drop (*bindu*) of origin, the *jīva* is penetrated by the *kuṇḍalinī* energy.<sup>163</sup>

## 2. The pneumatic practices

In yoga, the principal motor behind the transformation of mundane semen into divine nectar of immortality is a pneumatic one. With particular reference to the expositions put forward in the Trika exegeses the next couple of subsections will examine the role of breath in order to raise *kuṇḍalinī*.

### *The practice of prāṇa*

The exact meaning of the term “*prāṇa*,” as Silburn observes, varies with the levels of the cosmos and could be rendered as “consciousness,” “life,” “energy,” “breath,” “inhalation” and “exhalation.”<sup>164</sup> In fact, in Trika texts the idea of *kuṇḍalinī* is often replaced by that of *prāṇa* or instead referred to as *prāṇakuṇḍalinī*, the life-giving breath. For example, the *Vijñānabhairava* speaks of the arising *śakti* within the body in the form of *prāṇa* without mentioning the *kuṇḍalinī*.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, the subtle form of *prāṇa* is denoted by the syllabic sound (*varṇa*). Kṣemarāja in this context describes that when the energy of *kuṇḍalinī* shines and pulsates in the form of *varṇakuṇḍalinī*, the *kuṇḍalinī* with all the phonemes, she conjoins the subtle sound (*nāda*) and the self-reflecting awareness (*vimarśa*) in an infusion of her manifest form as *prāṇakuṇḍalinī*.<sup>166</sup> By this Kṣemarāja points to the manner in which the subtleties of sound vibration from the macrocosmic plane infuses the human being through the up- and downward movements of the breath energy called *haṁsa*, which, in turn, on its way strikes the phonetic syllables connected to his metaphysical body.

The concept of *prāṇakuṇḍalinī* along with related ideas of the arising of energy and sound function primarily through visualization or meditation (*dhyāna*), which, Flood argues, “allows for the realization of the coextension of the individual and cosmic bodies.”<sup>167</sup> In order to raise the *kuṇḍalinī* through the formation of *prāṇa* the yogin should

<sup>162</sup> Dyczkowski, “Erotic Goddess,” 140.

<sup>163</sup> Dyczkowski, “Erotic Goddess,” 139-40 n. 27.

<sup>164</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 83.

<sup>165</sup> *Vijñānabhairava* v. 24.

<sup>166</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 142 n. 158.

<sup>167</sup> Flood, *Body and Cosmology*, 256.

Meditate on the *śakti* rising from *mūlādhāra*, which is luminous like rays of the sun and which gets subtler and subtler until it dissolves in *dvādaśānta*. Then the state of Bhairava will awaken. [Meditate on] the rising *śakti* in the form of lightning, as it moves upward from one *cakra* to the other until it reaches *dvādaśānta*. At the end is the great awakening.<sup>168</sup>

The raising of *prāṇa* within the body is thus facilitated through visualization. As suggested by the ambiguous image of lightning, both mental image and the experience of energy arising in the body are united. The final dissolution of this force at the crown of the head is the revealing of the body of consciousness here called Bhairava, the horrible appearance of Śiva.

Although *prāṇa* is the force of manifestation, and therefore of bondage, it is equally when drawn up the central channel to the *dvādaśānta* a means of transformation. In practice this means that the breath moves from grossness (*sthūla*) into an inner friction of subtlety (*sūkṣma*) as the yogin rises higher within his body and, eventually, reaches beyond into the “supreme vibration” (*paramaspanda*) of the universe.<sup>169</sup> In the continuum of breath from the body of consciousness to the individual body, the yogin’s “inner journey” in this way parallels the cosmic creative unfoldment.

### ***The practice of uccāra***

The three concepts of breath (*prāṇa*), sound (*mantra*, *varṇa*, *nāda*) and *śakti* (*kuṇḍalinī*) in Śaiva practices are intimately drawn together within the body, which they traverse and pervade. For instance, in the context of transformation through “arising” (*uccāra*),<sup>170</sup> the three terms are interchangeable.<sup>171</sup>

In tantric literature the term *uccāra* (or *uccāraṇa*) is designated variously, but is often used to denote breath as a means to liberation. The word *uccāra* sometimes has a derived meaning of utterance or pronunciation of a letter as an emission of sound resulting from the upward movement of the breath. In connection with *haṃsa*, however, *uccāra* is not the actual pronunciation of a sound, but the conjunction of the phonic energy with *prāṇa*, thus being nothing other than the human and cosmic energy, the *kuṇḍalinī*.<sup>172</sup> Hence, when the *uccāra* occurs in the yogin’s body it is of an operation at once corporeal and phonic, since the stages of the *uccāra* carry the yogin from the level of empirical speech and of thought-construct to the supreme stage of the transcendent Śiva. The Trika tradition, then, correlates each of these stages with a particular spot in the subtle body. The *uccāra*, when located in the

<sup>168</sup> *ā mūlātkiraṇābhāsāṃ sūkṣmāt sūkṣmatarātmikām / cintayettāṃ dviṣaṭkānte śāmyantīm bhairavodayaḥ // udgacchantīm taḍidrūpāṃ praticakraṃ kramātkramam / ūrdhvaṃ muṣṭitrayaṃ yāvat tāvadante mahodayaḥ // (Vijñānabhairava vv. 28-29).*

<sup>169</sup> Flood, *Body and Cosmology*, 262.

<sup>170</sup> The word *uccāra* derives from the prefix *ud* + the root *car*, “to move up.”

<sup>171</sup> Flood, *Body and Cosmology*, 263.

<sup>172</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 399.

body, is thus deemed to extend from the heart center to the *brahmarandhra*, and then beyond up to the *dvādaśānta*.<sup>173</sup>

In the context of the serpentine *kuṇḍalinī*, the term *uccāra* denotes the ascent of energy as sound of vibration which affects the body. A sample of the various connotations ascribed to the term *uccāra* are found in a brief passage of the *Tantrāloka*, which explains the so-called “Energy Piercing” (*śāktavadya*) where the *guru*, having taking his own *kuṇḍalinī* upward, is said to enter the body of the disciple who, accordingly, has his *kuṇḍalinī* awakened and raised:

O Beautiful One! Through *uccāra* of the lower muscles of the trunk [the master] exerts an upward thrust upon the essence of the energy up to the possessor of the energy (i.e., Śiva); then, spontaneously, without any effort of utterance, he lifts the coiled serpentine energy dwelling in the triangular seat. Let him, by her help, pervade the entire universe. Such is the description of the piercing by means of the energy, in which the penetration [resembles] that of the bumble bee.<sup>174</sup>

In this passage *uccāra* assumes numerous connotations, among which is its distinctive feature of the attendant sound of the natural humming of a bumble bee. With the purpose of making the *kuṇḍalinī* ascend through *uccāra* as an upward contraction by means of the muscles of the rectum, the energy awakens simultaneously in both *guru* and disciple. When the *kuṇḍalinī*, hitherto sleeping in the lowest of the subtle centers, ascends in complete transgression, the disciple’s energy permeates the universe, thus making it impossible to detect even the slightest difference between the cosmic energy and the divine *kuṇḍalinī*.

### ***The practice of the prāṇa-vāyus***

In more explicated contexts *uccāra* is associated with the sensations of the flow of the five breaths within the body (*prāṇa-vāyus*), namely *prāṇa*, *apāna*, *samāna*, *udāna*, and *vyāna*,<sup>175</sup> which the yogin resolves through mediation (*dhyāna*) upon the breath that is the consequence of the cosmic process itself, hence transcending limitations and raising the *kuṇḍalinī*. In Kashmir Śaivism this meditative exercise that constitute the visualization of the subtle centers located along the central axis of the body and *kuṇḍalinī*’s upward journey through them is an integrate portion of the practices constituting the *āṇava-upāya* (“individual means”).<sup>176</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 407.

<sup>174</sup> *Tantrāloka* 29.246-47; tr. Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 96.

<sup>175</sup> It should be noticed that the functions of the five *prāṇa-vāyus* as described here in the context of tantric yoga practice are distinct from the functions described in the context of Indian medical literature, which, nevertheless, is linked to the tantric functions in certain ways. For example, *udāna* is associated with speech, and the power of speech derives from Parā-vak, the goddess of the supreme word, who is identical with the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* that eventually comes to designate the innate intelligence of embodied consciousness (Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 478 n. 165).

<sup>176</sup> This is the fourth and most inferior of four different skilful means or ways (*upāyas*) to liberation, of which the first and respectively most superior three are: *an-upāya* (“non-means”) which

Under the heading of the *āṇava-upāya* Abhinavagupta in the fifth chapter of his *Tantrasāra* prescribes five successive steps in the *uccāra* practice, corresponding to the sequence of the five *prāṇa-vāyus* mentioned above. In one of two variations of the fifth step, when the fusion of the *samāna-vāyu* – the breath relating to the vital energy – is perfected, the *prāṇa-śakti*, teaches Abhinavagupta, will suddenly rise up through the *susumṇā* in the form of the *udāna* (“up-breath”). This form of the upward-moving vital energy, the *udāna-vāyu*, is in later tantric and the *haṭhayoga* traditions identified with the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti*. The *āṇava-upāya* diverts the flow of the vital breath from its more usual course and induces it to enter the central channel, along which it rises as the pure conscious energy technically called *kuṇḍalinī*, and thus leading the yogin to an elevated state of consciousness in which he enjoys the pure awareness of unity. In this moment, Abhinavagupta says, there occurs a spontaneous ascension towards the highest center, where Śiva eternally resides. This is the final stage of *prāṇa-uccāra*, which cannot be accomplished by any forceful exertion whatsoever, but only experienced as complete unity between the knower (*pramātr*), act of knowing (*pramāṇa*), and the known (*prameya*).<sup>177</sup>

Having illustrated in the *Tantrāloka* 5.43-53 the *prāṇa-vāyus*’ recovery of the cosmic nature, Abhinavagupta further explains that at the moment *vyāna-vāyu* surges forth the yogin experiences the bliss of consciousness (*cidānanda*).<sup>178</sup> When breath blends with the free *śakti* pervading the universe, the yogin, whose actions are of a cosmic nature, then experiences the bliss known as universal (*jagadānanda*), which in its relation to the energy at the source of all the breaths, *prāṇaśakti*, is surpassing the *cidānanda*.<sup>179</sup> As he thus transgresses the limitation of common conscious experience through the various stages of the *prāṇa-vāyu* practice, the yogin transcends his awareness into total unity with the consciousness of the absolute. We thus see that Abhinavagupta’s *prāṇa-vāyu* practice is not separable from a conceptual matrix: the framework and the experience are inextricably intertwined.

The five breaths also play a pivotal role as the internal sensation at a certain stage in the *maṇḍala* installation, a detailed internalized tantric ritual of the emanation and subsequent reabsorption of cosmic sound-energy, which involves the awakening of the *kuṇḍalinī*. The complicated ritual involves the placement of the *triśūlābjamaṇḍala* (“*maṇḍala* of the trident and lotuses”).<sup>180</sup> This *maṇḍala* specific to

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in fact the *tāntrikas* do not count as a “real” *upāya*, *śāmbhava-upāya* (“divine means”), and *śākta-upāya* (“empowered means”).

<sup>177</sup> In this context, the final stage would be the entry into the highest state of pure consciousness (*pramiti*) (see table 1 in Dyczkowski, *Doctrine of Vibration*, 176).

<sup>178</sup> This phenomenon is peculiar to where the serpentine energy is identified as *citkuṇḍalinī* (“*kuṇḍalinī* of consciousness”). The feminine serpentine energy recognized in this particular form is perceivable, although only from a vantage point of complete disinterest to the bliss that is identical with her appearance (Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 63).

<sup>179</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 75-77.

<sup>180</sup> The *triśūlābjamaṇḍala* is built up along the axis of internal sensation to contain the complete hierarchy of the Śaiva cosmos (*bhuvana*) constituted of the 36 *tattvas*. The trident (*triśūla*) symbolizes the three goddess Parā, Parāparā, and Aparā, who should be visualized as enthroned on



the Trika school acts as an internal map, by use of which the practitioner may visualize the various stages of yogic emancipation that he is undergoing. Sanderson describes the process thusly:

The fused breath (*samāna*) is totally dissolved and the “fire” of the rising breath (*agni*, *udāna*) blazes up from below the navel. Devouring all duality it ascends through a central, vertical channel (*suṣumṇā*), penetrating the cranial “aperture of Brahṁā” (*brahmarandhra*) to culminate as Śiva-consciousness (= *vyāna*) at a point twelve finger spaces (c. 20 to 25 cm.) directly above it (*dvādaśānta*, *ūrdhvakunḍalinī*). In the present phase of the ritual the level of inner sensation underlying the movement of inhalation and exhalation is extended in imagination along the *suṣumṇā* and the *triśūlābjamaṇḍala* is projected in ascending stages along it. Thus the worshipper evokes through ritual the actual, yogic rise of the liberating central power (*kunḍalinī*).<sup>181</sup>

The worshipper thus aspires to experience the *kunḍalinī*’s rise during the ritual itself by mentally installing the *triśūlābjamaṇḍala*.

### 3. The practice of *laya*

A great concern of the yogin’s practice that is valuable in regard to the cosmic evolutionary theory is the doctrine of cosmic reabsorption or dissolution (*pralaya*), which concerns the conscious rising of the *kunḍalinī*. In this connection the *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* teaches that

The wise and excellent yogin...should lead *kula-kunḍalī* along with the *jīva* to her lord the Paraśiva in the abode of liberation within the pure lotus.... When he thus leads [*kula-kunḍalī*], he should make all things absorb (*laya*) into her.<sup>182</sup>

In this yogic ascent of the *kunḍalinī*, the four phonemes of the *mūlādhāra* stand for the gross elements (which are first to be dissolved) and so forth up the highest *tattvas* in the *ājñācakra*. Then all the phonemes will appear in the *sahasrāra* from *a* to *kṣa*, and no longer in the reversed order. The *sahasrāra* thus contains the pure energy prior to the reabsorption, which is identical to the energy lying at the center of the

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three white lotuses that rest on the tips of the trident, which is imaginatively superimposed along the *suṣumṇā* of the worshipper’s body so that the trifurcation rises through the space of twelve finger breadths above his head (*dvādaśānta*) (Sanderson, “Śaivism,” 673-74).

<sup>181</sup> Alexis Sanderson, “Maṇḍala and Āgamic Identity in the Trika of Kashmir,” in *Mantras et Diagrammes Rituels dans l’Hindouisme*, ed. André Padoux (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1986), 178.

<sup>182</sup> *nitvā tām kulakunḍalīm layavaśājjīvena sārḍham sudhīr / mokṣe dhāmani śuddapadmasadane śaive pare svāmini / dhyāyediṣṭaphalapradām bhagavatīm caitanyarūpām parām / yogīndro gurupādapadmayugalāmbī samādhau yataḥ ||* (*Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* v. 52).

*mūlādhāra*.<sup>183</sup> This process is identical to the unfoldment of the cosmos, but in the reverse order.

A phonic process occurs parallel to the process of dissolution on the three ascending levels of consciousness, *vyāpinī*, *samānā*, and *unmanā*, which Kālīcaraṇa respectively calls *vyāpikā-śakti*, *samānī*, and *unmanī*.<sup>184</sup> However, by switching *samānī* with *unmanī* in this sequence and instead making it *vyāpikā-śakti*, *unmanī*, *samānī*, Kālīcaraṇa thus describes the phonic process of dissolution to progress as follows: *Nāda* dissolves into *nādānta* (“end of *nāda*”),<sup>185</sup> the *nādānta* into *vyāpikā-śakti*, the *vyāpikā-śakti* into *unmanī*, the *unmanī* into *samānī*. Finally, with reference to a certain Vaiṣṇava teacher named Keśavācārya, Kālīcaraṇa explains that the level of *samānī* dissolves into the “mouth of Viṣṇu” (*viṣṇu-vaktra*), the Vaiṣṇava counterpart to the “lotus-mouth of Śiva” or *sahasrāra*.<sup>186</sup> That means, during this process in which the *kuṇḍalinī* pierces the six centers, the yogin’s mind gradually dissolves into Śiva’s abode (*śivasthāna*) in the *sahasrāra*. The sonic absorption from the *nāda* up to *sahasrāra* described as a sequence of dissolution (*laya-krama*)<sup>187</sup> is, in fact, a process in which consciousness is dissolved into the nature of the material world.

The process of dissolution is effectuated, the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 4.10 declares, by steady practice of various *āsanas*, *kumbhakas* and *mudrās*,<sup>188</sup> through the success of which the yogin gradually reaches two, but interdependent, aims: control of his breath and of his mind.<sup>189</sup> The *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* in simple words explains the yogic process of dissolution thusly:

The breath (*pavana*) dissolves where the mind dissolves (*līyate*);<sup>190</sup> the mind dissolves where the breath dissolves. (...) The mind is lord of the organs of sense; the breath (*māruta*) is lord of the mind. *Laya* is lord of the breath, and that *laya* has *nāda* for its basis.<sup>191</sup>

The piercing of each center is here an upward movement equated with reabsorption, a cosmic dissolution (*pralaya*). The *kuṇḍalinī*’s awakening marks the beginning of

<sup>183</sup> *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa*, comm. v. 52.

<sup>184</sup> *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa*, comm. v. 52, p. 472.

<sup>185</sup> I.e. that beyond *nāda*.

<sup>186</sup> *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa*, comm. v. 52, p. 472.

<sup>187</sup> This process is in the *haṭhayoga* texts identified as *layayoga*.

<sup>188</sup> Whereas early texts teaching *haṭhayoga* mentioned neither the *cakras* nor *kuṇḍalinī*, the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*’s success ensured that the raising of *kuṇḍalinī* became the rationale for many of the practices of *haṭhayoga*. With *kuṇḍalinī* came a variety of other practices and aims (Mallinson, “Haṭha Yoga,” 774).

<sup>189</sup> *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 4.10.

<sup>190</sup> The verb *līyate* comes from the root *lī*, “to dissolve,” from which derives the word *laya* (Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 903,2).

<sup>191</sup> *mano yatra vilīyeta pavanastatra līyate / pavano līyate yatra manastatra vilīyate || (...) indriyāṇaṃ mano nātho manonāthastu mārutah / marutasya layo nāthaḥ sa layo nādamāśritaḥ ||* (*Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 4.23,29). The translation is slightly modified by myself.

the yogin's own withdrawal into his yogic sleep or trance, into the total integration that is *samādhi*. On this issue, White elaborates that

In the universal scheme of things, the great yogin, be he named Śiva or Viṣṇu, ultimately “awakens” – pours himself out into mundane being of which the sleeping *kuṇḍalinī* is the end- or turning-point – in order that human yogins might find a way to genuinely “fall asleep,” i.e., enter into the yogic sleep of *samādhi*.<sup>192</sup>

We have thus in this bipolar model on the one hand a yogic withdrawal and return, and on the other a kalpic cycle of divine withdrawal (dissolution, *pralaya*) and return (emission, *sṛṣṭi*). Hence, the *kuṇḍalinī*'s sequential travels up and down the spinal column are respectively referred to as *laya-krama* and *sṛṣṭi-krama*.<sup>193</sup> On the microcosmic level this yogic reintegration affords liberation and bliss, while on the macrocosmic level it is nothing other than the *pralaya*, the universal reabsorption of all mundane existence into the primordial essence.

#### 4. The *kuṇḍalinī* awakening as a remedy for disease

In the texts of *haṭhayoga* the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening becomes increasingly associated with alleviation or the complete elimination of disease. The *Khecarīvidyā* in detail list into various categories the following diseases that are removed by raising the *kuṇḍalinī*: eye-disease, trembling of the body, fever, dizziness, tooth disease, lack of strength, loss of suppleness of the body, high fever, headache, imbalance of the phlegmatic humour, vomiting, breathing trouble, blindness, and sleep that cannot be overcome.<sup>194</sup> The exact remedy is effectuated by a procedure starting with a *prāṇāyāma* technique, which include that the yogin raises the primordial goddess, Kuṇḍalinī, from the disturbance of whom a great sound (*mahānāda*) arises that, hence, liberates him. Subsequently, the yogin visualizes his body be sprinkled by a nectar (*amṛta*).<sup>195</sup> With the body thus satiated by nectar, the yogin benefits in several ways from the *siddhis* that are, accordingly, attained.<sup>196</sup>

The *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* teaches that a “gastric fire,” which concentrates within the space of the *suṣumṇā*, is generated simultaneously with the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening.<sup>197</sup> This remarkable heat apparently effects the gradual transformation of raw semen into cooked,<sup>198</sup> and even into a stream (*dhārā*) [of perfected nectar (*amṛta*)] which gradually fills out the moon in the cranial vault.<sup>199</sup> With the body thus inundated in nectar from head to toe, the yogin becomes endowed with a

<sup>192</sup> White, *Alchemical Body*, 221.

<sup>193</sup> *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa*, comm. v. 53, p. 475.

<sup>194</sup> *Khecarīvidyā* 2.88-91.

<sup>195</sup> *Khecarīvidyā* 2.92-94a.

<sup>196</sup> *Khecarīvidyā* 3.4-8.

<sup>197</sup> *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 4.19.

<sup>198</sup> *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 4.28.

<sup>199</sup> *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 4.46.

superior body, great strength, and valor.<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, in the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* (which ascribe the *kuṇḍalinī* to be a support of all its yoga practices)<sup>201</sup> and in other *haṭhayoga* texts certain individual postures that explicitly raise the serpentine energy, besides leading to steadiness, health, suppleness and making the breath enter the *suṣumṇā*, also removes diseases, etc.<sup>202</sup> Another remedial exercise is the *haṭhayogic kumbhaka* called *bhrastikā* that is claimed to both raise the *kuṇḍalinī* and be purifying, pleasant, and beneficial by removing the obstructions caused by the three humors (*doṣas*), flatulence (*vāta*, *vāyu*, or *māruta*), bile (*pitta*), and phlegm (*kapha*).<sup>203</sup>

## 5. The *kuṇḍalinī* withdrawal: Transmutation and effect

In the visualizations taught in the Kubjikā Tantras, the *kuṇḍalinī*, on reaching the store of *amṛta* located in the head, returns to the *mūlādhāra* from where she came, flooding the body with the *amṛta* as she withdraws. This is also the result of the *haṭhayogic khecarīmudrā* taught in the *Khecarīvidyā*, which describes the process of the *kuṇḍalinī*'s descent: When the *kuṇḍalinī* has been lead up through the various centers to unite with Śiva in the cranial vault, death will eventually approach the yogin who rests with his awareness for awhile in that location, above which – contrary to the region beneath – he knows there is no opportunity of bodily death. However, seeing that his death has passed, the yogin leads back to *mūlādhāra* the *kuṇḍalinī*, whose energy has now reproduced his *jīva* and sense organs.<sup>204</sup>

According to Kālicaraṇa, when the *kuṇḍalinī* has reached the *brahmarandhra* in the cranial vault, and there drunk the red nectar issuing from her union with Śiva, she and a stream of celestial nectar (*divyāṃṛtadhārā*) commence the trajectory down the *suṣumṇā* (a.k.a. *citrinī-nāḍī*). During her withdrawal, she infuses a vital fluid (*rasa*) into the various elements and *cakras*, which she absorbed on her upward traverse. As they are infused by the fluid, the elements and *cakras* manifest into the gross material world, where they accordingly become visible. Having passed the various centers and, eventually, entered the *mūlādhāra*, the *kuṇḍalinī* resumes the shape of a coiled sleeping snake.<sup>205</sup>

The two types of the mundane and transcendence poles of the *kuṇḍalinī*'s mode of being – sleeping and waking, etc. – are identified as her poison and her nectar, respectively. The *kuṇḍalinī* is the poison when she remains asleep in the lower abdomen; she is nectar precisely when she rises up through the *suṣumṇā* of the subtle body to reunite with Śiva in the yogin's cranial vault. In the *haṭhayogic* sources, this

<sup>200</sup> *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 4.53.

<sup>201</sup> *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 3.1.

<sup>202</sup> This can be attained, for instance, through the *matsyendrāsana* (*Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 1.27) and *padmāsana* (*Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 1.44-48).

<sup>203</sup> *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 2.66.

<sup>204</sup> Paraphrasing *Khecarīvidyā* 3.40-48.

<sup>205</sup> *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa*, comm. v. 53.

union is in fact accompanied by an outpouring of nectar (*amṛta*), which renders the yogin immortal. Through the raising of the *kuṇḍalinī*, the haṭhayogin is thus capable to transmute poison into nectar. More properly speaking, that which is poison for mortal beings is for the haṭhayogin, who through the *haṭha* techniques has united the polarities within himself, identical to nectar. Thus, metaphorically for their mastery of the metaphysic energy of the *kuṇḍalinī*, numerous Nāths, White reports, were “known for their ability to control (and charm) serpents” and, moreover, “for their ability to treat poisons as elixirs.”<sup>206</sup> This is but one of numerous yogic metaphors for the mastery of the force that sleeps in the lower part of the body, a force that, when awakened, transforms the yogin’s being completely.

Let us recap this part. We have covered the various ritual and yogic methods that are given meaning and form part of the attempt to raise *kuṇḍalinī*. The subtle body practices provide a new and different purpose and significance for transformative sexual rituals within the tantric context of attaining cosmic consciousness, where we also encounter a multiplicity of references to the notions of sexual fluids. In this connection, it is supposedly the serpent’s coiling and straightening that explains its projection upon the subtle body: a poisonous serpent, when coiled, is dangerous; but straightened, it is no longer threatening. This would be of a piece with the characterization of the *kuṇḍalinī* as poison when she lies coiled in the lower body and nectar when she is extended upward into the cranial vault.

The rising and return of *śakti* piercing the centers along the central axis within the body is particularly accomplished in the contexts of breath-regulating exercises, meditations, and accompanying pneumatics and phonemics. In this manner the practitioner is aligning himself with tradition as well as with the construction of his subtle body. The cosmogonic theory of the kalpic cycle of emission and dissolution was foundational for the *layayoga* practice of *kuṇḍalinī*’s rise and withdrawal that, again, was standardized and incorporated into the *haṭhayoga* techniques. During the transition from tantric ritualism into *haṭhayoga* the *kuṇḍalinī*’s rise is no longer merely associated with liberation and the attainment of *siddhis*, but becomes a remedy for numerous diseases.

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<sup>206</sup> White, *Alchemical Body*, 222.

## PART IV

### Discursive Analysis and Discussion

This section will analyze and discuss the discourses connected to the concept of *kuṇḍalinī* in terms of various philosophical aspects, although it could be argued that several issues within the discourse of one aspect are applicable or fall in under the discourse of another aspect. In his comprehensive portrayal of the Śaiva tantric tradition, *Tantra Illuminated*, Wallis presents the following terms among a handful of others:

- Ontology: What is the fundamental nature of reality? What is “being”? What can we say about existence?
- Epistemology: How do we know anything? What are the valid means of knowledge? How can we test what we think we know?
- Phenomenology: What is the nature of conscious experience?<sup>207</sup>

These terms particularly central to Western philosophy are not addressed in a systematic manner in tantric and haṭhayogic literature, but nevertheless applicable to clarify the Hindu tenets of the *kuṇḍalinī*. Since the ontological aspects of the *kuṇḍalinī* practice and theory specifically relate to the topics of cosmogony and metaphysic, which explicitly have been covered in the major part of this thesis, the ontological discourse will not be further addressed in the following discussion.

#### 1. The epistemological discourse

In context of the epistemological perspective, we will examine the extent to which the yogin’s subjective experience of the *kuṇḍalinī* practice tells him about true reality. We will in reviewing the epistemological aspect approach the *kuṇḍalinī* concept of primarily Śaiva Tantrism within the framework of three conditions, which Abhinavagupta requires are achieved before the practitioner’s acquisition of true knowledge can be said to be wholly established. Indeed, in the beginning of *Tantrasāra*’s fourth chapter, Abhinavagupta tells us that the process of contemplation (*bhāvanā-krama*), which leads to experiential knowledge of reality, is based on these three conditions:

1. Sound and careful reflection on your experience (*sat-tarka*).<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 69.

<sup>208</sup> *Sattarka*, literally meaning ‘right reasoning,’ also denotes an orthodox system of Hindu philosophy.

2. The guidance of a great teacher (*sad-guru*) who is skilled in the meditative enquiry and has attained its fruit.
3. The wisdom of the scriptures (*sad-āgama*).<sup>209</sup>

According to Abhinavagupta, when these three prerequisites come together in agreement, the adept knows he/she has arrived at truth.<sup>210</sup>

The first condition is encountered in relation to the three ascending levels of consciousness – *vyāpinī*, and so forth – where cosmic consciousness, accordingly as the universe emerges, is gradually reduced into the limited confines of mundane awareness. Indeed, the adept has succeeded his *kuṇḍalinī* practice not instantaneously the moment his mind is fused into cosmic consciousness as the serpentine energy reaches the *dvādaśānta* center above the cranial vault, from where a stream of nectar percolates down through the various psychic centers, but completely merely when the *kuṇḍalinī*, eventually, enters the *mūlādhāra* and thus vivifies and makes visible for him the manifest world.

The Trika school approaches the epistemological discourse with the allegation that the yogin is incapable to experience the *kuṇḍalinī*, who remains unknown in her supreme state at the heart of Śiva, an approach that is somewhat different in *haṭhayoga*. Only at the time of death, when his awareness is extending beyond the mind (*manonmanī*) in the final fusion with universal consciousness (*saṃvid*), the yogin may, at best, get a few glimpses of the *śaktikuṇḍalinī*.<sup>211</sup> Assuming the form of pure quiescent energy that is not yet turned outward, the *kuṇḍalinī* at this state lies dormant resting in the form of pure universal consciousness (*saṃvid*). Here, some explanatory clarification is necessary in that *śaktikuṇḍalinī* is expressed by the *tāntrikas* in the form of the *visarga*,<sup>212</sup> the phoneme *ḥ*, which is transcribed into Sanskrit in the form of two superposed dots (:) representing the twofold tendency peculiar to this energy. The upper dot thus represents the *parākuṇḍalinī* of universal consciousness, while the lower dot the *prāṇakuṇḍalinī* which pertains to the gross aspect of consciousness, concealing its true essence at the stage of illusion (*māyā*).<sup>213</sup> Indeed, pure universal consciousness is the universal space (*vyoman*) that embraces all the spiritual extensions, thus making room for the unfoldment of every configuration of experience. It is at once Bhairava and the supreme form of *śakti* termed *parākuṇḍalinī*, equally consciousness and its contents.<sup>214</sup> *Parākuṇḍalinī*, therefore, denotes both the first movement which brings universe into existence as well as the corresponding movement to that of the process of cosmic emanation.<sup>215</sup>

<sup>209</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 70.

<sup>210</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 70.

<sup>211</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 63. The term *śaktikuṇḍalinī* is a.k.a. “*kuṇḍalinī* as reflective awareness” (*vimarśakuṇḍalinī*) (Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 21).

<sup>212</sup> The term *visarga* in tantric cosmology also refers to the cosmic emission.

<sup>213</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 21-24.

<sup>214</sup> Dyczkowski, *Doctrine of Vibration*, 199.

<sup>215</sup> Padoux, *Vāc*, 126.

A further division is formulated, since the *prāṇakuṇḍalinī* is asserted to manifest in two successive phases: First as lower energy (*adhahkuṇḍalinī*), then as raised or ascended energy (*ūrdhvakūṇḍalinī*). The first one is a descent of energy from the uvula at the *tālu* to the *mūlādhāra*, whereas the second is an ascent of energy through the *suṣumṇā*. In the context of “the five states of awareness”<sup>216</sup> the first phase finishes at the threshold of the fourth state (*turya*), the second reaches completion beyond, i.e. in *turyātīta*. Thus, the *adhah-* and *ūrdhvakūṇḍalinīs* are situated at two different states: the *adhahkuṇḍalinī* in the transitional state between known and knowledge, while *ūrdhvakūṇḍalinī* between knowledge and knower.<sup>217</sup> In this light, one may resonate that the yogin by combining these two streams of the *kuṇḍalinī* movement thus gives rise to an intense self-awareness, where subject and object, microcosm and macrocosm, are merged into an intermediate state of undifferentiated indivisible consciousness.

In order to explain Abhinavagupta’s second condition – the importance of a charismatic *guru* – we shall once again turn to the *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa*, one of numerous examples of the sort of transmission of spiritual knowledge which occurs within the traditional lineage (*paramparā*) teachings between disciple and master. While explaining the liturgies of inner worship, the text states:

The yogin who has gained steadiness of mind makes offering to his chosen tutelary deity (*iṣṭa-devatā*) and to the deities in the six centers...with that stream of celestial nectar (*amṛta*) which is in the vessel (i.e., *kuṇḍalinī*) of *brahmāṇḍa* (“the universe”), the knowledge whereof he has gained through the tradition of the *gurus*.<sup>218</sup>

In intense meditation with unperturbed heart and concentrated mind the disciple would point his attention inwardly to the lotus of a thousand petals, the *sahasrāra*, wherein his awareness should immerse with that of the *guru*.<sup>219</sup> The *guru* is beyond doubt one of the primal sources, if not the source *par excellence*, for the disciple to succeed raising the *kuṇḍalinī* energy. The *guru*’s oral instructions are considered to be pivotal for the yogic process which, besides reciting the *haṃsa-mantra*, consists of contracting the heart and raising the *kuṇḍalinī* by various breathing techniques.<sup>220</sup>

The transmission from master to disciple thus took place from heart to heart, from body to body. Furthermore, at times new recruits wished to enter the religious community and to follow its traditions the *guru* would play a central, liturgical role. In the ceremonial ritual of initiation (*dīkṣā*) of the comprehensive tantric rite where the divinely revealed *mantras* were employed (*mantra-nyāsa*) into the subtle body of

<sup>216</sup> These five are: the waking (*jāgrat*), dream (*svapna*), deep sleep (*suṣupti*), fourth or transcendental (*turya*), and beyond the fourth (*turyātīta*) states. For more detailed definitions of the five states of awareness, see Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 175-80.

<sup>217</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 64.

<sup>218</sup> *taddivyaṃmṛtadhārayā sthīramatiḥ samtarpayeddaivatam / yogī yogapramparāviditayā brahmāṇḍabhāṇḍasthitam ||* (*Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* v. 53cd).

<sup>219</sup> This is described in the introductory-verse by Acalānanda to the *Pādukāpañcaka*.

<sup>220</sup> *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa*, and comm. v. 50.



those with proper entitlement or qualification (*adhikāra*), it was believed that the *guru*'s *illuminated* consciousness was able to penetrate or pierce (*vedha*) the disciple's *obscured* consciousness in order to enlighten it.<sup>221</sup> At a sacred space centered on the initiatory *maṇḍala* or sacred diagram the *guru* then performed an elaborate meditative visualization, in which he fused the *suṣumṇā* of his subtle body with that of the initiand. Subsequently, by means of special *mudrās* ("hand gestures"),<sup>222</sup> the *guru* would fuse his own consciousness that was raised through his *suṣumṇā* passing through the subtle centers with that of the initiand.<sup>223</sup> Various methods to this initiation were performed on a purely inner level by piercing the centers in attempt to bring forth the median breath energy (*madhyaprāṇakuṇḍalinī*). Listing several types of piercings, Abhinavagupta in the *Tantrāloka* 29.263-64 explains that during the piercing through wisdom (*viññāna-vedha*) the master transfers knowledge to the disciple by means of the subtle thread of his conduits (*nāḍīs*).<sup>224</sup> Hence, a *sad-guru* was not merely considered a teacher of information but a transmitter of the power of experiential understanding.

Finally, we will consider the importance of scriptural transmission in regard to *kuṇḍalinī* practice. Contrary to philosophical discourses, textual dissemination to acquire spiritual insight plays a secondary role in the *kuṇḍalinī* teachings. Nevertheless, scriptures exist as a representative document of the collective wisdom perpetuated through the continual tradition of spiritual transmission from *guru* to disciple in a particular lineage (*sampradāya*). Indeed, scriptures are merely a comprised bulk of idiosyncratic experiences, the reality of which each individual practitioner himself must explore through the doctrines and techniques made available in these documents. For, as Silburn states regarding the proficiency in

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<sup>221</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 331-33. The *mudrā* described at the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 3.25-28 under the name *mahāvedha* ("Great Piercing"), in which the *kuṇḍalinī* is forced into the *suṣumṇā*, is a corporealization of the tantric *vedhadīkṣā*, the initiation through piercing of the subtle centers.

<sup>222</sup> What accounts for both Tantrism and *haṭhayoga* is that a *mudrā* (lit., "sign" or "seal") is not just a hand gesture but any posture of the hands, body or awareness. Abhinavagupta, who nearly equates the word *mudrā* with *karaṇa*, a yogic trance in which the virtual divinization of the trans-intellectual levels is actualized by ascent through the cranial aperture to the *dvādaśānta*, suggests those with a sincere wish to awaken should adopt and practise the *mudrās* the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* has revealed in advanced meditators. Alluding to its literary meaning, Abhinavagupta advocates that a *mudrā* arises spontaneously in profound meditation or mystical experience (*samāveśa*) as a "sign" of attainment or a "seal" of the awakened consciousness, while classical *haṭhayoga* describes *mudrā* as a purpose to awaken the *kuṇḍalinī* (see e.g. the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 3.5). The most important *mudrā* in Abhinavagupta's optic, the *khecarīmudrā* – the real nature of which had been forgotten by the time of the *haṭhayoga* manuals that describe a corporealization of the tantric technique under that name – is essentially, according to Abhinavagupta, a name for a procedure of intensifying the "central energy," a name for the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* at the base of the spine, and of raising it to the crown of the head, thus thereby achieving a higher state of consciousness (Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 400-2).

<sup>223</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 335-36.

<sup>224</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 99-100.

*kuṇḍalinī* practice, “book knowledge remains fruitless if not paralleled with extensive experience.”<sup>225</sup>

The instructions or explanations documented in the scriptures are not considered by the practitioners themselves to be merely “death words” passed down from a remote ancestral tradition, but rather living esoteric teachings which can directly influence and amplify their spiritual process. However, as Kālicaraṇa states, “It can be learnt from the *guru* alone, and not from ten million *śāstras*.”<sup>226</sup> Nevertheless, in its closing stanza the *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* assures the practitioner that if he

...reads this work which is the supreme source of the knowledge of liberation (*mokṣajñāna*), and which is faultless, pure, and most secret (*para-gupta*), then of a very surety his mind dances at the feet of his chosen tutelary deity.<sup>227</sup>

By completely engrossing in the descriptions of the *cakras*, the arousal of *kuṇḍalinī*, and so forth explained in the confidential texts, the practitioner, through continual yogic practice, will eventually embody the psychic phenomena experienced during the liberating state of unity with Śiva. In terms of Abhinavagupta’s three conditions, the yogin would thus say from the epistemological perspective that he knows from his sensational and subtle observational experiences of the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening and, moreover, from the grace bestowed onto him by the *guru* during his initiation into the tradition, all of which he can recall and recognize in the testimonies documented in the scriptures teaching the secret *kuṇḍalinī* practice.

The haṭhayogic approach to *kuṇḍalinī* awakening was to a large extent associated with removal of diseases and the attainment of *siddhis* rather than cosmic consciousness. The *Śivasamhitā* 5.5 even mentions various types of knowledge (*jñāna*) that are obstacles for understanding the ultimate reality, among which knowledge of the subtle anatomy and of yogic practices associated with *kuṇḍalinī* are included. Nevertheless, there exist few references in the *haṭhayoga* manuals in the context of *kuṇḍalinī* that indicate the accomplishment or byproduct of some sort of epistemological nature. Thus, the *Śivasamhitā* 5.157 declares that the indivisible, pure gnosis is made known when *kuṇḍalinī* and the mind is absorbed respectively into the supreme self and the object of meditation. The *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* states that the power of *kuṇḍalinī* (*śaktiprabhāva*) may not only evoke a blissful bodily sensation, but can lead to unequalled knowledge (*bodhamatula*) as well.<sup>228</sup> Similarly, besides death, the *mahāmudrā* technique, by which the serpentine energy straightens, is claimed to conquer the five *kleśas* (afflictions): ignorance or illusion (*avidyā*), egoism, attachment, repulsion, and clinging to life.<sup>229</sup> The *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* declares

<sup>225</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 92.

<sup>226</sup> *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa*, comm. v. 50, p. 456. Kālicaraṇa here cites an unknown text.

<sup>227</sup> *yo ‘dhīte niśi samdhyayorathe divā yogī svabhāvasthito / mokṣajñānanidānametadamalaṃ śuddhaṃ ca guptaṃ paraṃ / śrīmacchrīgurupādapadmayugalāmbi yatāntarmanā- / stasyavaśyamabhīṣṭadaivatapade ceto narīṇṛtyate // (Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa v. 55).*

<sup>228</sup> *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 1.48d.

<sup>229</sup> *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 3.14.

that the yogin will know himself to be Brahmā by the union of Śiva and śakti from the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening.<sup>230</sup>

## 2. The phenomenological discourse

In terms of the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening, the yogin are dealing with experiential phenomena, which occur in connection with religious rituals or yogic practices rhetorically delineated in a metaphorical language, rather than with a dialectic- or logic-oriented philosophy. Considering the phenomenological aspect – the truth-value of experience – of the *kuṇḍalinī* energy, we must, therefore, examine the causal effects from the ascending and descending *kuṇḍalinī* both to the point of the yogins' physicality as well as to the point of his inner state of being. For instance is some kind of internal experience a universal prerequisite for the initiation rite. Hence, Abhinavagupta stresses the importance of internal experience matching or transcending external practice.<sup>231</sup>

A great phenomenological example to consider is the appearance of the *kuṇḍalinī* as vibrant energy generating psychosomatic oscillations, which directly affect the yogin's physical body. Where the Trika school presents a metaphysical structure that is related to five centers – the *mūlādhāra*, *kanda*, *hṛdaya*, *tālu* and *brahmarandhra* – these are identified respectively with five states or signs (*cihnas*): bliss (*ānanda*), jump or bound (*udbhava* or *pluti*), trembling (*kampa*), mystical sleep (*nidrā*), and whirling (*ghūrṇi*).<sup>232</sup> These five bodily phenomena are states of spiritual development, the vibrations of which the yogin experiences due to the power of *kuṇḍalinī* filling his entire body. These mystical experiences occur in rapid succession as the corresponding centers are affected and the *kuṇḍalinī* energy begins to spread within the yogin's entire being. However, the vibrations which the *kuṇḍalinī* generates, Abhinavagupta assures, are nothing more than the reaction of the yogin in contact with the plenitude (*pūrṇatāsparsā*) of the divine and, therefore, cease as soon as his energy is reabsorbed into mundane consciousness.<sup>233</sup> Silburn suggests the culminating stage, in which the yogin experiences the vibratory whirling (*ghūrṇi*), refers to an inner churning that mixes the two poles of the macrocosm and microcosm at the source of emission and reabsorption.<sup>234</sup> As the intensity of the whirling increases to infinity and becomes one with the ever active primordial vibration, which is none other than the fully-unfolded *kuṇḍalinī* in *brahmarandhra*, the yogin is lifted to universal consciousness and, accordingly, recognizes his identity with the entire world. With his energy turned into the all-pervading *kuṇḍalinī*, the yogin, whose centers have been pierced one after the other and by

<sup>230</sup> *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* 3.42.

<sup>231</sup> Wallis, "Descent of Power," 264.

<sup>232</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 71-76.

<sup>233</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 72 n. 1.

<sup>234</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 74.

which, in turn, his subjectivity gradually is poured into the universal consciousness, experiences himself one with Śiva at the culminating stage.

Supposedly, evidences of the five signs could also occur in relation to the sophisticated phenomenon of *śaktipāta* (“descent of power or grace”)<sup>235</sup> denoting the preliminary or conversional spiritual awakening, which was believed could directly lead new recruits to wish for complete initiation. Being simply the codification of an internal *kuṇḍalinī* experience, *śaktipāta* thus denotes a transmission of insight from *guru* to initiand, which involves a spontaneously descent of energy or grace percolating through the centers of the latter.<sup>236</sup> Nevertheless the marginality of explication, *kuṇḍalinī* appears in the context of initiation in a brief passage of the *Tantrāloka* (29.248-51) on the “cobra” style of the *vedhadīkṣā*, the so-called “Serpent Piercing” (*bhuja[n]ga-vedha*), which is an initiation subsequent to the primary one only given to those with a wish to pursue *bhoga*.<sup>237</sup> However, the identification of the *kuṇḍalinī*, which is not named explicitly in the passage, is somewhat tenuous.

Delineating a series of thirteen stages through which the *kuṇḍalinī* traverse, Somānanda (fl. c. 900-950) in his *Śāktavijñāna* (v. 24) explains that the *kuṇḍalinī* at the tenth stage generates various symptoms, which follow from the energetic transformation affecting the yogin. As she rises, the yogin may experience: “horripilation, flood of tears, tendency to yawn, stammering, bursting of the knots, divine joy of touch, and vibrations in the *bindu*.”<sup>238</sup> However, when the *kuṇḍalinī* eventually permeates all the *nāḍīs*, bursting open the knots in the centers, she pours a divine sensation of bliss (*ānanda*) into the entire body.<sup>239</sup>

An experience of *ānanda*, or bliss, is the most common byproduct of the yogin’s practice and a feedback mechanism for consciousness. At the peak of his practice the yogin attains the type of “state of realization” which implies the coexistence and, maybe even, interdependency of bliss and consciousness. Nevertheless the degree to which an experience may be blissful, *ānanda* for the yogin, as Wallis confirms, “is simply the chief byproduct of realization, it is not the goal of the path,”<sup>240</sup> as is also the case of the supernatural powers (*siddhis*) acquired from haṭhayogic exertion.

Indeed, there seems thus no straightforward argument for separating the epistemological discourse from the phenomenological discourse in terms of *kuṇḍalinī* practice, since insights into and the true knowledge of reality and mystic phenomenological experiences (*samāveśas*) in this yogic method are invariably intertwined. Of course only physiological and sensational effects, to which may be a claim of transformation occurring from the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening, can rightfully be

<sup>235</sup> In this regard it should be mentioned that the terms *āveśa*, *śaktipāta*, and *vedha* in some tantric texts are used more or less interchangeably, which is probably the reason why modern interpreters tend to conflate the two terms *śaktipāta* and *dīkṣā*.

<sup>236</sup> Wallis, “Descent of Power,” 266.

<sup>237</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 97.

<sup>238</sup> In Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 110. “Vibration in the *bindu*” refers to *vīrya* (“energy”).

<sup>239</sup> Silburn, *Kuṇḍalinī*, 114.

<sup>240</sup> Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated*, 80.

measured – not the achievement of gnosis. Any observance perceiving the inner, metaphysical structures of the body – although these are numerable in both tantric and haṭhayogic literature – remains the proposition of a subjective experience; something that could explain the diversification in descriptions of the subtle body's interior.

### 3. Modern interpretations of the *kuṇḍalinī*

What can we tell about the modern appropriation of the term *kuṇḍalinī*? By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century printed images of the yogic bodies reflected a slow but visible transformation through encounters with the world of science and medicine, which lead to reflect on the yogic body through anatomical eyes. At this time there occurred a growing visual engagement with the vocabularies, concepts, symbols and measures of science as a new source of legitimizing authority. One of the earliest known indigenous medical paintings is an 18<sup>th</sup>-century image of yogic anatomy superimposed on a medical body.<sup>241</sup> Nevertheless the painting is primarily a medical image, not a tantric or a yogic one, there is what Dominik Wujastyk terms a discernible “Indianization” of the medical body in the superimposition of six *cakras* faintly drawn onto the spinal column and the *kuṇḍalinī* serpent coiled at the base of the spine below the outline of the body.<sup>242</sup> Despite its predominantly medical content, the painter was seemingly motivated to integrate his own artistic and cultural background with the more typical indigenous tantric image of the body, featuring *cakras* and *nāḍīs*.<sup>243</sup>

Attempts to produce modern and alternative interpretations of the subtle physiology were not unusual in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The attempt to return to a literalist interpretation of yogic and tantric physiology and to equate it with medical/anatomical images of the body is demonstrated in Haṃsasvarūpa Mahārāja's *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇacitram* published in c. 1903. Through text and illustrations, which assimilates the features of the subtle physiology – the *cakras*, energy channels, and so forth – with the anatomical body, Haṃsasvarūpa argues for the physical reality of the tantric body.<sup>244</sup> While subtle body depictions of the *cakras* were based on traditional iconography, a somewhat different visual interpretation was introduced in the West by the Theosophist Charles W. Leadbeater (1854-1934), whose *The Cakras*, first published in 1927, was a leading conduit for public acquaintance of the tantric *cakra* doctrine outside India. Leadbeater made one of the early attempts to schematize the yogic body by applying prevailing ideas of *cakra* images in order to give readers a potent and poetic visual metaphor for spiritual awakening as a

<sup>241</sup> Find a print of this particular painting, in Debra Diamond, *Yoga: The Art of Transformation* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 2013), 276.

<sup>242</sup> Dominik Wujastyk, “Interpreting the Image of the Human Body in Premodern India,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 13(2) (2009): 210.

<sup>243</sup> Wujastyk, “Premodern India,” 211.

<sup>244</sup> Wujastyk, “Premodern India,” 201.

*kuṇḍalinī* force: a serpent moving as a brilliant thread along the central *suṣumṇā* pierces six lotus *cakras* located not necessarily in a straight line, but linked with elements (humors) and within anatomically recognizable organs in the body.<sup>245</sup>

Taking up Leadbeater's idea of turning the yogic process into a physiological one, the Indian biomedical doctor Vasant Rele, one of the earliest "scientizers"<sup>246</sup> of the *kuṇḍalinī* phenomenon and author of *The Mysterious Kundalini: The Physical Basis of The "Kundalini (Hatha) Yoga" in Terms of Western Anatomy and Physiology* first published 1927, advocated that the system of the subtle body and *kuṇḍalinī*'s movement within it have neurological equivalents. With its anatomical illustration of the *kuṇḍalinī* serpent in the center of an inverted triangle radiating energy with the following inscription beneath: "The *kuṇḍalinī* is sleeping above the *kanda* dispensing liberation to yogins and bondage to fools. He who knows her knows yoga,"<sup>247</sup> *The Mysterious Kundalini* became among the first to establish and popularize a scientific basis for yogic physiology and *haṭhayoga* practice.<sup>248</sup>

The translation and widespread dissemination of the texts on yoga outside India were also historically paralleled by the emergence of Western depth psychology.<sup>249</sup> At a time when psychology was characterized by the reign of behaviorism, of positivist experimental epistemology, and of the growing dominance of psychoanalysis, *kuṇḍalinī* practice presented C.G. Jung (1875-1961) with a model of something almost completely absent in Western psychology.<sup>250</sup> Heavily inspired by Woodroffe's *The Serpent Power*, which consists of translations of the *Śaṭcakranirūpaṇa* and the *Pādukāpañcaka* together with extensive commentaries, Jung found in yoga a rich storehouse of symbolic depictions of inner experiences and of the individuation process in particular, claiming that important parallels with yoga and analytical psychology had come to light especially with the *kuṇḍalinī* practices and symbolism of tantric yoga.<sup>251</sup> Well aware that yoga has particular religious connotations in the indigenous Indian culture, Jung did not proclaim to have any personal experience with *kuṇḍalinī* awakening, but rather attempted to appropriate the yogic teachings into a cross-cultural comparative psychology of inner experience by differentiating his approach from Eastern understandings.<sup>252</sup> Jung thus claimed that the symbolism of *kuṇḍalinī* teachings suggested that the symptomatology patients at times presented actually resulted from a *kuṇḍalinī* awakening.<sup>253</sup>

Since Jung, phenomenal occurrences following a *kuṇḍalinī* awakening have more systematically been recorded by contemporary practitioners and, furthermore,

<sup>245</sup> Diamond, *Yoga*, 277.

<sup>246</sup> For more information how this term is applied, see Diamond, *Yoga*, 279.

<sup>247</sup> Cited in Diamond, *Yoga*, 279.

<sup>248</sup> Diamond, *Yoga*, 279.

<sup>249</sup> C.G. Jung, *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1932 by C.G. Jung*, ed. Sonu Shamdasani (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), xviii.

<sup>250</sup> Jung, *Kundalini Yoga*, xxiv.

<sup>251</sup> Jung, *Kundalini Yoga*, xxix.

<sup>252</sup> Jung, *Kundalini Yoga*, xxviii-xxix.

<sup>253</sup> Jung, *Kundalini Yoga*, xxvi.

carefully examined by the scientific establishment. Claiming to have awakened the serpentine energy, Gopi Krishna (1903-1984), a contemporary yogin and author dedicated to a modern interpretation of *kuṇḍalinī* practice, records on his quite unexpected and uncontrolled experience of a phenomenal burst of energy the following:

Suddenly, with a roar like that of a waterfall, I felt a stream of liquid light entering my brain through the spinal cord. (...) The illumination grew brighter and brighter, the roaring louder, I experienced a rocking sensation and then felt myself slipping out of my body, entirely enveloped in a halo of light.<sup>254</sup>

Indeed, Gopi Krishna's report here of the gradual increase of light corresponds perfectly to descriptions of the *kuṇḍalinī* in various tantric texts. For instance, the *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* states that the brilliancy of *kuṇḍalinī* is like "a strong flash of young strong lightning,"<sup>255</sup> and adds that *kuṇḍalinī*, having pierced all the subtle centers, "shines therein in the fullness of her lustre."<sup>256</sup> Likewise, there exist numerous reports on "out-of-body experiences" in relation to *kuṇḍalinī* awakenings, which, however, conventional psychiatrists typically have interpreted as delusional, since to accept them as in some sense ontologically real would undermine the very foundation of Western understanding of the relationship between brain, body and consciousness.<sup>257</sup>

Gopi Krishna democratized, so to speak, the *kuṇḍalinī* phenomenon by promoting its scientific investigations, thereby making it widely known in the modern world. On the one hand Gopi Krishna was adamant that the *kuṇḍalinī* is a spiritual reality, while on the other hand he passionately advocated that it is the biological mechanism responsible for sainthood, genius, and insanity alike. As he put it:

What my own experience has clearly revealed is the amazing fact that though guided by a super-intelligence, invisible but at the same time unmistakably seen conducting the whole operation, the phenomenon of *kuṇḍalinī* is entirely biological in nature.<sup>258</sup>

Of course, from a tantric point of view, which holds that immanence and transcendence are coessential, any strict distinction between matter and spirit makes little sense.

Even though Gopi Krishna's work contributed greatly towards a phenomenology of the *kuṇḍalinī* experience, there still remained a need for further research and, at

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<sup>254</sup> Gopi Krishna, *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (Berkeley: Shambhala, 1971), 12-13.

<sup>255</sup> *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* v. 10.

<sup>256</sup> *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* v. 51.

<sup>257</sup> Lee Sannella, *The Kundalini Experience: Psychosis or Transcendence?* (California, US: Integral Publishing, 1987), 102.

<sup>258</sup> Gopi Krishna, *Kundalini: The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (N.Y.: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), 88.

least, conceptual clarification. This challenge was met by modern scientists, among whom the American psychiatrist and ophthalmologist Lee Sannella was at the forefront. Sannella designates the curious physical phenomena associated with the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening collectively as “physio-*kuṇḍalinī*” and, accordingly, the complex phenomenon of her ascent and descent through the spinal column as a “physio-*kuṇḍalinī* process,” a “cycle,” or a “mechanism.”<sup>259</sup> This sophisticated model, from which Sannella presents these aspects of the *kuṇḍalinī* thus understood in neurophysiologic terminologies, was developed by the Israeli American Isaac Bentov (1923-1997), a scientist as well as a mystic, who perceiving the *kuṇḍalinī* process from a mechanic point of view claimed that the body contains a standing electromagnetic wave system. These waves, Bentov thought, trigger the brain to produce the type of visionary, auditory, and other sensory experiences that are typical of *kuṇḍalinī* awakenings.<sup>260</sup>

Having explored at some length the existing literature and evidences of the so-called “*kuṇḍalinī* awakening experience” and, particularly, its association with “psychosis,” Sannella points out that it, along with all the “psychotic”-like symptoms, “seem[s] pathological only because the symptoms are not understood in relation to outcome: a psychically transformed human being.”<sup>261</sup> In his appendix to Joyce MacIver’s 1983 *The Glimpse*, in which MacIver graphically describes her out-of-body experience, Sannella wrote that “her journeys into the hidden levels of reality had a positive, healing and revelatory effect on her life.”<sup>262</sup> Sannella also implies that the stirring up of “the sediments of the unconscious” is an intrinsic aspect of the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening, confronting a person with “just those psychic materials he or she wishes to inspect least of all.”<sup>263</sup> It seems in Sannella’s optic that the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening is a phenomenon of multiplicative determinations, being simultaneously the process of purification, of healing deep unconscious psychic material, and of a transmutation of mind into a higher and qualitatively enriched level of consciousness.

We may conclude that the modern appropriation of *kuṇḍalinī* was especially characterized by various scientific explanations attempting to advocate factually for the *kuṇḍalinī* and the subtle body’s anatomical correlations. The term *kuṇḍalinī* was adopted by Western scientists primarily to explain a phenomenological experience, but without the clarification of on which sources the association of psychosomatic phenomena with an ascent of *kuṇḍalinī* was based. Since scientists generally refer neither to the original Hindu theories that the *kuṇḍalinī* is basically an energy within the body which equals the dynamic, creative force of the evolving universe or the Hindu rituals and practices to which Indian yogins have sworn for numerous centuries in order to raise the serpentine goddess, the modern attempt to associate

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<sup>259</sup> Sannella, *Kundalini Experience*, 34.

<sup>260</sup> Feuerstein, *Yoga Tradition*, 357.

<sup>261</sup> Sannella, *Kundalini Experience*, 7.

<sup>262</sup> Quoted in Sannella, *Kundalini Experience*, 102.

<sup>263</sup> Sannella, *Kundalini Experience*, 98-99.



*kuṇḍalinī* with various psychosomatic phenomena seems an unjustifiable extrapolation from her original context in Hindu tradition. Indeed, the phenomenal experience that occurred in the type of *kuṇḍalinī* awakening the Tantras and *haṭhayoga* manuals envisioned as the climax of a spiritual quest scientifically is difficult to investigate and prove the validity of.

## Conclusion

The outset of the present thesis was to test the hypothesis that the rituals, practices and cosmogonic perspective embedded in tantric *kuṇḍalinī*-teachings were partly altered or replaced in classical *haṭhayoga* manuals, which instead emphasized the physiology- or posture-oriented aspects of yoga. This first led to an examination into the Hindu cosmogonic principles of emanation and reabsorption as well as into the concepts of macrocosmic homology. Indeed, Tantra sources from approximately the middle of the first millennium enunciated the Vedic concept of the macrocosm-microcosm parallels, which similarly was embedded in the tantric *kuṇḍalinī*-method. We saw that notions such as the emanation of the universe through life-force and vibrating sound-energy were particular cosmogonic constituents since Vedic times.

Nevertheless, the tantric religious ideas were distinguished by their self-conscious difference from Vedic ideology and by a number of other typological features. Indeed, the basis of the cosmogonic theories was adopted and further expanded in the Tantras in the expressive symbolism of highly sophisticated yogic and ritual practices that aimed to awaken the serpentine energy, the *kuṇḍalinī*. Just as the Vedic body was profoundly implicated in ritual meaning, the tantric body, an example of a non-anatomical body, was an instantiation of the universe in miniature and a conduit for mystical energies which awaken the serpentine energy. Thus, although the rudiments of *kuṇḍalinī* and subtle body imagery can be found as far back as the Upaniṣads, it was not until the advent of the Śaiva corpus that *kuṇḍalinī* fully emerged as a central ontological, soteriological and ritual phenomenon.

Now, what has our investigation shown in regard to the hypothesis of the differences between tantric and haṭhayogic presentations and applications of *kuṇḍalinī*? We do not find the haṭhayogic dynamic to the Kujikā's system of the *cakras*, although we encounter the notion of a process of yogic refinement. The tantric concept of the *kuṇḍalinī* explicitly involved the notion of tuning human action to an envisioned cosmic order onto the plane of human experience. This theory seems lesser emphasized as the *kuṇḍalinī* was appropriated into haṭhayogic expositions, in which the serpentine energy eventually represented an element of synthesis from various medieval religious traditions. Although comprising an overall spiritual orientation, the *haṭhayoga* manuals favored the physical methodology and achievements. Despite fragmented elements of the Hindu cosmogonic theory are found scattered in various *haṭhayoga* texts, they were by no means prerequisite doctrines for succeeding in the *haṭhayoga* practice.

Although the Tantras employed a physiological methodology by using the sexual rituals as a means to reach cosmic consciousness, it was nevertheless the dynamic, liberating effect of the power embedded in the symbolism of these coital practices that remained the focal point of the practitioner. The *haṭhayoga* texts codified the practices deeply indebted to the Kaula Tantras, but divorced from their sectarianism,

doctrinal systems, and elaborate rituals. Hence, the idea of transmuting semen into nectar, etc. was, presumably, easy to adapt or adjust into a *kuṇḍalinī* practice by the *haṭhayoga* practitioners, since they dismissed the corporality of sexual teachings. In the *haṭhayoga* scriptures *kuṇḍalinī*'s awakening became explicitly associated with removal of diseases, increased vitalization, and strengthened physical and mental health. Thus, although the hypothesis' assertions in general are valid, it seems within contexts the term *kuṇḍalinī* was involved that we are not presented in *haṭhayogic* manuals with comprehensive notions which fundamentally diverged from that of the Śaiva Tantras, but rather a confluence of metaphysical speculations, various yogic techniques, and concepts of bodily transmutation and an altered state of mind, etc.

The argument for the liberating nature of the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening was possible to move from the discourse of one system to that of another – e.g., from the tantric to *haṭhayogic* system – and thereby emerged, it could be asserted, a further expanded, coherent and multilayered expression of yogic *kuṇḍalinī* teachings. What is common in all *kuṇḍalinī* teachings is the fact that the metaphysics serve as a theoretical framework supporting a body of spiritual disciplines; it is never merely abstract speculation. More than a reasoned opinion, it indicates the practitioner's attitude to his own experience, an attitude which forms his activities to raise the serpentine energy.

Searching for words that at once comprehensively encapsulates both the theoretical and practical aspects and both the spiritual and physical aspects of especially the tantric tenets of the *kuṇḍalinī* energy, I would subscribe to the term "cosmotheandric," which suggests that the human being in all its aspects, the universe, and the god[dess]head, are all involved in one and the same evolutionary process taking place on manifold levels of creation. Cosmotheandric is the culmination of the Roman Catholic priest and scholar Raimon Panikkar's (1918-2010) speculation, with which he endeavors to offer a synthesizing principle of all different traditions and spiritualities.<sup>264</sup> Panikkar describes his idea as follows:

I should like to present this cosmotheandric principle with the minimum of philosophical assumptions. And the minimum here is that reality shows this triple dimension of an empirical (or physical) element, a noetic (or psychic) factor, and a metaphysical (or spiritual) ingredient. By the first I mean the matter-energy complex, the cosmos; by the second, the *sui generis* reflection on the first and on itself; and by the third, the inherent inexhaustibility of all things: the cosmic, the human, and the divine.<sup>265</sup>

In the same manner as Panikkar in his holistic vision consisting of three different perspectives – the physical, the psychical, and the spiritual dimensions, which in turn can be seen empirically, noetically, and metaphysically – pursues a synthetic understanding of the traditional philosophies and religions, we can reasonably, I

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<sup>264</sup> For a full discussion of Panikkar's cosmotheandricism, see Jyri Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion?: Raimon Panikkar's Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005).

<sup>265</sup> Quoted in Komulainen, *Cosmotheandric Religion?*, 198.

would argue, perceive the tenets connected with the *kuṇḍalinī* dynamics similarly in that light.

With this study, I have attempted to thread depictions of *kuṇḍalinī* in order to come to an understanding of how different traditions may have collectively viewed its role and purpose within the broader field of tantric and haṭhayogic ontology and soteriology. Hopefully, with more translations and research of other tantric and haṭhayogic texts, in which *kuṇḍalinī* is exhibited, we may be able to more broadly link together the core tenets of *kuṇḍalinī* in the pursuit to further discover her original purpose and adaptation.

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